The New Criterion

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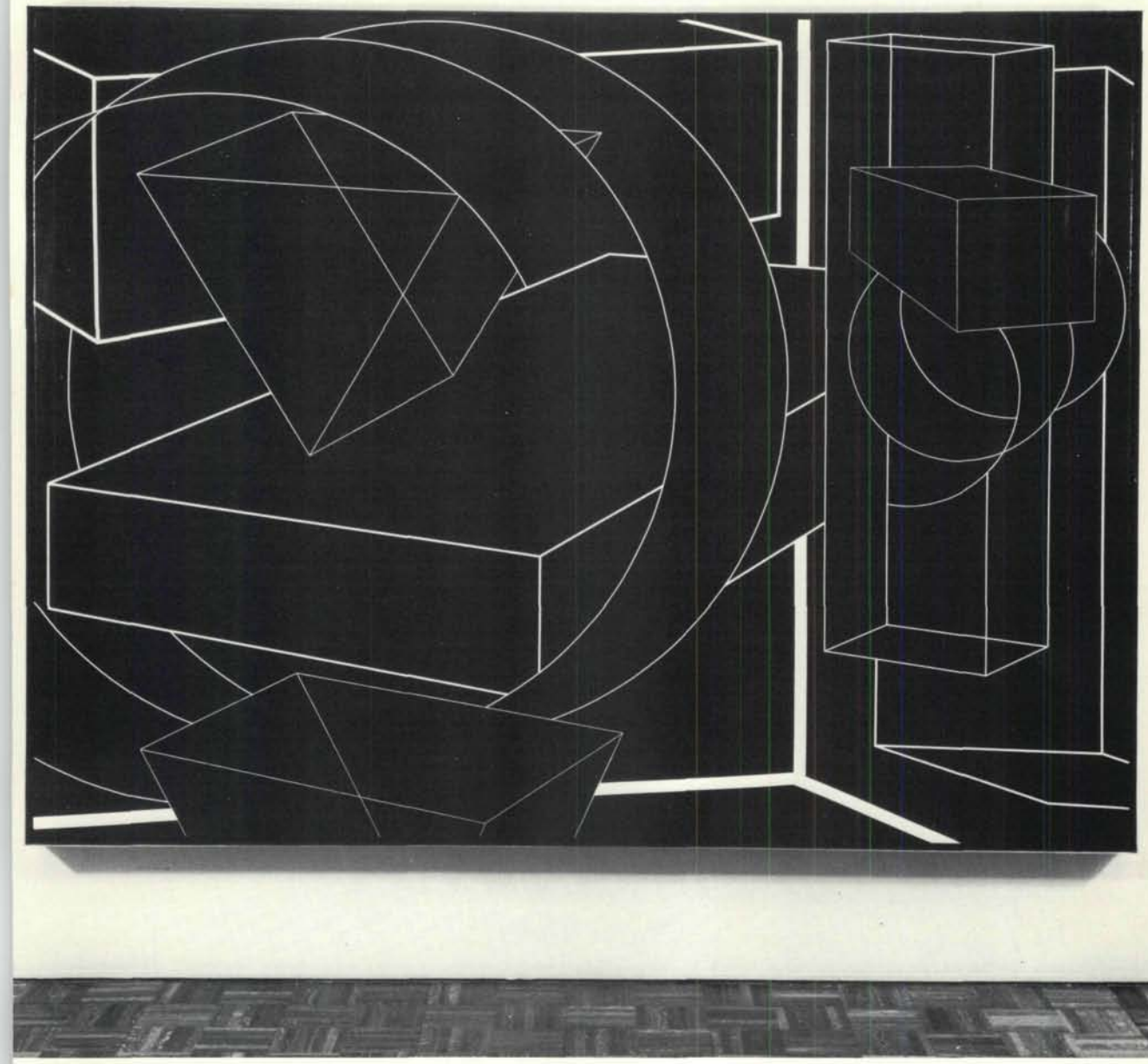

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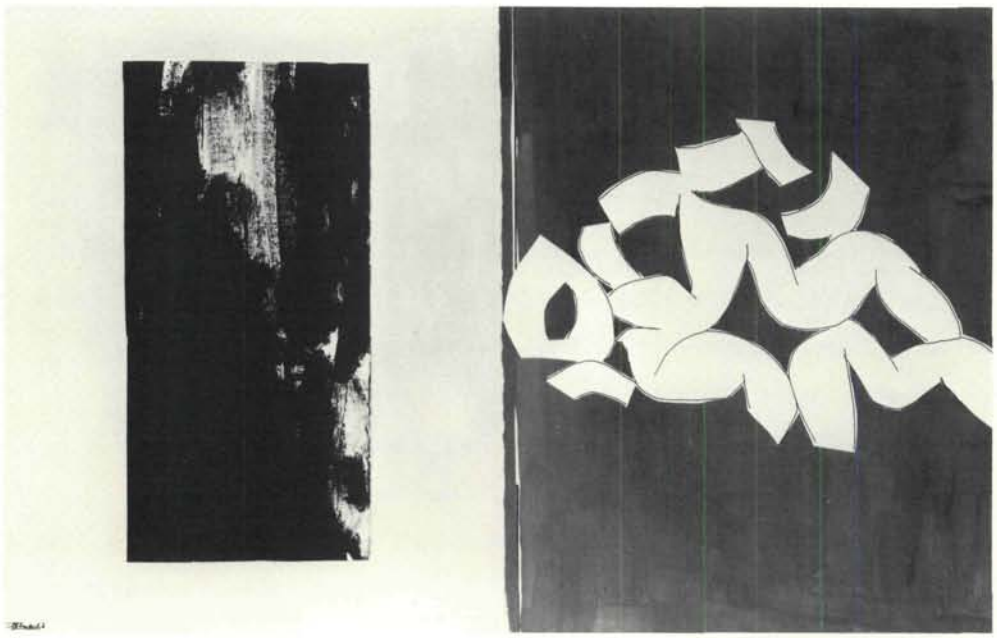

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Marc Chagall 1887-1985

by Hilton Kramer

It was inevitable, perhaps, that the headline on *The New York Times*'s front-page obituary of Marc Chagall would describe him as "One of Modern Art's Giants." This was the status which the press had routinely conferred upon the artist for as long as anyone could remember, and it would have been churlish—if not something worse—to deny him this outsize claim on the occasion of his death at the age of ninety-seven. It may, after all, have been one of the last occasions on which the claim could be made without risking ridicule. Posterity, which can always be counted on to observe a different code of etiquette in regard to fame of this sort, is unlikely to be so kind.

Yet if Chagall was never exactly the towering "giant" which his admirers had long taken him to be, he was certainly a better painter and a more interesting artist than his detractors—who were also numerous—were generally willing to grant. It was in fact Chagall's reputation as a "giant" which came more and more to act as an obstacle to any clear understanding of his achievement. To that reputation he owed the large decorative commissions of his later years—commissions which proved, in all too many cases, to be unmitigated aesthetic disasters, and which had the effect of making the artist an object of contempt for anyone capable of distinguishing artistic quality from its meretricious counterfeit. The generation that knows Chagall primarily as the author of those ghastly murals at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, for example, can easily be forgiven for regarding him as something of a hack. It was New York's misfortune—and not only New York's, of course—that such commissions came to Chagall when he was no longer in a position to do them justice, and it was Chagall's misfortune that they came to loom so large in the public's perception of his gifts.

But there is another Chagall, as we know. He is a smaller and more distant figure, to be sure, than the hyped-up colossus who, in the last three decades of his life (when his artistic powers were clearly on the wane), became a kind of mascot of government agencies, cultural bureaucrats, and religious publicists the world over; but this figure is a more authentic one. And it is to him that we must turn if we are to recover a sense of the artist's special quality and power. In this other Chagall—the young and vigorous artist who had made his way from the provincial backwater of Vitebsk to the cosmopolitan art worlds of St. Petersburg and Paris in the first decade of the century—we shall find the originals, so to speak, from which all those later counterfeits were made and remade with such an easy, disspiriting fluency. We shall find something else as well—an artist of far narrower and more intensely inward interests than could ever be suspected from the anodyne public symbols and universalist sentiment which made the decorative projects of the later years so appealing, so popular, and so empty.

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By a happy stroke of timing, the retrospective exhibition needed for the recovery of this more interesting and authentic Chagall was already in place at the time of his death on March 28. Organized by Susan Compton at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, where I saw it in March, the exhibition goes on view this month at the Philadelphia Museum of Art—its only American showing.[1] While it is anything but complete—particularly in the way it scants, for example, the artist's immense graphic oeuvre, where some of the best of his later work is likely to be found—this exhibition is at once a fitting memorial to Chagall and something of a milestone in itself. Dr. Compton is a specialist in modern Russian art. She thus brings to this exhibition precisely the perspective which in the past has so often been missing from the study of Chagall's art—a perspective which places the artist and his work firmly in the context of the Russian cultural milieu which exerted so great an influence on his artistic outlook. Much has been made—and properly made—of Chagall's life as a Jew, of course, and Dr. Compton does not neglect this crucial element in the artist's identity and in the subject matter of his art. But even this crucial matter is not easily separable from the Russian context, and it is especially to the illumination of the latter that Dr. Compton makes an important contribution. Hers is, I believe, the first major Chagall exhibition to give this subject its due. The essay Dr. Compton has written on "The Russian Background" for the catalogue of the exhibition, together with some of the detailed commentaries on individual paintings, adds a great deal to our understanding of the oeuvre as a whole. In the end we are fully persuaded that in some important respects "the Russian Chagall," as Dr. Compton writes, "takes precedence over the adoptive Frenchman, or even the Jew."

It certainly alters our view of the young Chagall to be made aware, as we are on this occasion, that until 1922, when the artist was thirty-five years old and had already produced the bulk of the work likely to retain a place among the classics of twentieth-century art, he had spent a total of less than four years outside his native Russia. For the better part of those four years (1910-1914) he was in Paris, and, as everyone knows, his encounter with the Paris avant-garde brought decisive and permanent changes in his painting. Yet even in this pivotal stage of Chagall's development he tended, not surprisingly, to frequent a distinctly Russian milieu—and this, in turn, had very specific consequences for both his art and his life. He was particularly close to the Swiss poet Blaise Cendrars, who had lived in St. Petersburg for three years (1904-1907) and spoke Russian. (So did the woman Cendrars married, Féla Poznanska, to whom Chagall was also close.) He was drawn into the circle of Sonia Delaunay, who was Russian, and her husband Robert Delaunay—probably the most important single influence on Chagall's painting in this Paris period.[2] In the studio building—the legendary La Ruche—where Chagall lived for a time, "there were so many Russian contributors to the Salon des Indépendants," Dr. Compton writes, "that it was even suggested that they should form a separate exhibit." And not all of the Russians who inhabited La Ruche were painters. One of them was the writer A.V. Lunacharsky, who, as Lenin's first Commissar of Education subsequently appointed Chagall to the position of Commissar of Art in his hometown of Vitebsk. It wasn't until 1923 that Chagall settled in France, and even then the first task he undertook on his return to Paris was to produce a series of etchings based on Gogol's *Dead Souls*.

1 "Chagall," directed by Susan Compton, was on view at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, from January 11 to March 31. At the Philadelphia Museum of Art, it can be seen from May 12 to July 7.

2 Susan Compton's catalogue, *Chagall* ($12.95 paperback), includes, in addition to her own valuable texts, an essay by Norbert Lynton—"Chagall 'over the Roofs of the World'"—that is particularly good on Chagall's relation to Cendrars and the Delaunay circle.

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Thus, the crucial turn in Chagall's life and work occurs not—as we have tended in the past to believe—in 1910, when he goes to Paris for the first time, but in 1922 when he uproots himself from his native Russia for the last time. From 1923 onward Chagall is a different kind of artist—an artist adrift in a dream of the past. There is even something apt in the choice of Gogol as the author he illustrated at this important juncture in his life, for not only does Chagall at that moment take leave of the present in order to find refuge in the past but there is a sense in which it can be said that he, too, now turns to trafficking in dead souls. The present is never again quite as real for Chagall as it was before 1922. Perhaps another way of saying this is that from this time onward he severs his connection with history. Thereafter, like those floating figures who now become so ubiquitous in his paintings—is this, perhaps, their real meaning?—he quits the realm of earthly events to enter a world of timeless and homeless archetypes, which, the further removed from real experience they become, the more they succumb to an unalloyed sentimentality. After his exit from Russia—which was also, it is worth recalling, his exit from the Revolution he served as an artist and a commissar—Chagall made some periodic attempts to re-attach his art to the realm of historical experience, most notably in the paintings he produced in 1944 as a response to the Holocaust. But by then it was too late. He no longer possessed the means of bringing that effort to an effective realization. In a sense he never touched earth again.

The difference between this "floating" Chagall, aloft in a world of increasingly unreal archetypes, and the young artist who preceded him is so striking and definitive that in the exhibition at the Royal Academy, where each period was afforded a separate gallery, one had the sensation of encountering the work of a quite alien personality as soon as one entered the third gallery, devoted to "France 1923-41." In the first two galleries, given over respectively to "St. Petersburg 1907-10 and Paris 1910-14" and "Russia and Berlin 1914-22," one saw an artist vibrant in his response to the diverse worlds he inhabited, an artist keenly observant of both familiar surroundings and new experiences, and eager to provide a vivid account of them in his painting. At the same time, it is painting itself that is clearly the most highly charged area of experience for this young artist. The intensity of Chagall's engagement with his medium is there in the earliest pictures—those dark and melancholy portraits and genre scenes, painted in St. Petersburg in 1908-1910, which have nothing of the light, the clarity, or the complexity that came into his art once he immersed himself in the Paris art scene, but which sing, all the same, with a vitality and tenderness that remain irresistible. They are the pictures of a young man for whom painting has become the central experience of life.

This headlong engagement is further intensified and brought to maturity in the pictures which Chagall produced with such dizzying speed and confidence in that first encounter with the Paris avant-garde. Let us remember that he was twenty-three years old when he arrived in Paris in the fall of 1910, and scarcely twenty-five when he painted *Half Past Three (The Poet), Homage to Apollinaire, The Soldier Drinks, I and the Village,* and *The Cattle Dealer*—his first masterpieces and almost his last. His entire experience until this time had been that of a Northerner, nurtured on the long, dark, snowbound ordeals of the Russian winter and the white nights of the Northern summer—a climate that is the natural habitat for the kind of introspective and melancholic expressionism that characterized the paintings of the St. Petersburg period. Upon a Northern sensibility of this sort we naturally expect the impact of Paris to have had the customary salutary effect—which it did, of course, but not always in the ways that might have been predicted. Chagall does not at this time become what Dr. Compton calls an "adoptive Frenchman." That was a development which came later, in the Twenties, when his

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art was already in decline. In this first Paris period Chagall's painting becomes, if anything, more deeply entrenched than ever in exploring his memories of Russia. Despite the Paris-from-my-window motif—a theme probably traceable to the influence of Robert Delaunay and never, in any case, a major one for Chagall—France remains a largely unrecorded experience in his painting. It never takes possession of his soul. What consumes his imagination is the life he left behind in Russia. What Paris gives him is a new way of encompassing that life in his painting.

Except in the case of Cendrars, for whom he always retained a tender and grateful memory, Chagall was notoriously ungenerous in acknowledging the influences—especially the avant-garde influences—which shaped his painting at a crucial stage of its development. Cubism, for example, he was later in the habit of mocking. Yet it was from Cubism that he derived the syntax of his greatest paintings. The entire design of a picture such as *Half Past Three (The Poet)* (1911) is unimaginable without that syntax, and so is the modeling of the face and the hands in *The Soldier Drinks* (1911-12). The whole subject is really beyond argument. The hard, crystalline quality of the forms in Chagall's painting, together with their transparency—which has the effect of radiating an inner light—and the discipline of their control, all this owes everything to Cubist precedents, and it is nonsense to claim otherwise. The precedents in question might have been Le Fauconnier's and Delaunay's rather than Picasso's or Braque's—as Norbert Lynton suggests in his essay for the catalogue—but that is a subsidiary issue. Cubism of one sort or another is central to Chagall's pictures in this period.

The question of Chagall's color, which also becomes an important element in his painting for the first time in this period, is less easily resolved. Fauvism is often claimed as the principal influence on Chagall's use of color, and it would be foolish to deny that Fauvist color played some role in the formation of his style. After all, it affected virtually every painter who followed closely in the wake of Matisse's chromatic audacities. Yet the fact remains that Chagall's color isn't really Fauvist in quality. Mr. Lynton shifts the emphasis in claiming that "it is primarily and specifically Delaunay from whom [Chagall] learnt the art of . . . using colour not just brightly (after his often dark Russian paintings) but also lightly, strong enough to give sensations of light but also transparently, freshly, so that light seems to come through the canvas as well as from it." This too is not to be denied. Yet it doesn't solve the problem, for Chagall's color isn't really Delaunay's either.

It seems to me there is a specifically Russian quality to Chagall's color that is not accounted for in these explanations. No doubt Fauvism—and Delaunay, too—taught Chagall much about the *importance* of color, but they would appear to have contributed little to the particular *quality* of the color he came to use. My own hunch is that the key is to be found in Post-Impressionist color (Gauguin especially) as it was adapted to Russian taste by Bakst, Chagall's teacher in St. Petersburg. There is a nocturnal, artificial, theatrical quality to Chagall's color we do not find in Matisse or Delaunay—but it is pervasive in Russian painting of this period. It is color which has almost nothing of the sun in it—it is interior and mystical, it has more to do with lamplight and memory than with the sun-drenched color of the French landscape or cityscape. It is color which has virtually nothing to do with natural light—color which therefore easily lends itself to illuminating the scenery of dreams. This, it seems to me, is its real function in Chagall's painting—to serve the interests of a dreamlike narrative.

Chagall was very touchy on the subject of "literary" painting. In Paris he was often said to be a literary painter—a "poet"—and he knew very well that in the avant-garde climate of the time, it was anything but a compliment. He was thus much concerned to deny the narrative character of his best paintings. But his was surely a tactical maneuver designed to outflank his "purist"

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critics. He could scarcely have believed it himself, for his whole conception of painting then and thereafter was inseparable from the narrative mode. It was indeed the narrative character of his painting which survived the loss of so much else when Chagall's whole pictorial enterprise began to come apart in the Twenties. Alas, it was what accounted in large part for his prodigious success when all else was gone.

It would be a mistake, however, to base our judgment of the narrative element in Chagall on his later, quite shameless exploitations of it. In the paintings of his first Paris period it is his highly imaginative use of the narrative mode that accounts for what is most truly original in the work. That he felt compelled to deny the very source of his own originality tells us something about the real relation in which Chagall stood to the world of "advanced" art in pre-1914 Paris —it was, in fact, an extremely tenuous relation—but it does nothing to alter the centrality of the narrative mode in his own art.

The narrative element continued to be a source of strength in the paintings Chagall produced when he returned to Vitebsk in 1914. But the ground shifted for the artist once he left behind the heady atmosphere of the Paris avant-garde, and his art changed, too. In important respects, it drew back even further from the radicalism of the avant-garde.

Chagall had journeyed to Berlin in the summer of 1914 for the opening of his one-man show at the Sturm gallery. From there he travelled to Vitebsk to see his family and the girl he hoped to marry (and whom he did marry the following year)—his beloved Bella. If it was the coming of the First World War that at first prevented Chagall from returning to Paris, it was no doubt the Revolution that kept him in Russia after 1917. For the Revolution, which he welcomed with enthusiasm, made him a power in the new Soviet art world. In 1918 he was named Commissar of Art for Vitebsk and the surrounding region. He presided over a museum, an art school, and theater production. By 1920-21, moreover, he was also designing productions for the new State Kamerny Theater in Moscow. It was to the Revolution that Chagall owed his emergence as a "public" artist.

But the power and position which he now enjoyed were anything but secure. In art matters, no less than in other realms of revolutionary ideology, factionalism abounded, competition for preferment was fierce, and the debates often acrimonious. The avant-garde was given unprecedented authority under Lunacharsky's short-lived reign as Commissar of Education, but did Chagall really qualify as a member of this new avant-garde? There were important figures in the expanding Soviet art establishment who thought not. In a cultural milieu that came more and more to look upon a doctrinaire commitment to abstraction as a test of revolutionary orthodoxy, Chagall's figurative paintings—which were even more avowedly figurative than thitherto—looked old-fashioned, a throwback, perhaps, to the despised bourgeois era. There were plots and intrigues and bureaucratic squabbles. Malevich, the leader of the Suprematists, was dispatched to Vitebsk to assist Chagall in his duties. There was a power struggle, and Chagall lost out. Whenever, years hence, Chagall could be heard denouncing abstract art, one could be reasonably certain that it was the power struggle with Malevich and his gang he had in the back of his mind.

Chagall's own paintings in this period are of several kinds. The best of them—*The Birthday* (1915), for example—continue very much in the narrative Cubist vein he developed in Paris. But joining these pictures now are others, like *David in Profile* (1914), a portrait of his brother, that are more studiedly objective in style—they resemble, in fact, some of the portraits that emerged from the New Objectivity movement in Germany in the Twenties. In still others, of which the marvelous *Bella with a White Collar* (1917) is the outstanding example, the narrative and objective modes are combined. There is also in these years a more concentrated interest in Jewish themes. Chagall's

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religious outlook does not succumb to the facile universalism he made famous in later years until he quits the scene of his childhood associations and family connections.

There are ample signs, even in this second Russian period, that Chagall had lost a certain sense of direction in his painting. The really achieved paintings come less often now and are less consistent in their strengths than the paintings he produced in Paris before 1914. But he remains recognizably the same artist who produced those earlier masterpieces.

What happened to that artist once he had left Russia for the last time is really terrible to behold. As one made one's way around the remaining galleries at the Royal Academy, the descent into banality, ineptitude, and a facile, repetitious attitudinizing was rapid and unremitting. Chagall had never been a leader of artistic thought, but he had once been a painter of authentic feeling and original vision. From the early Twenties onward, all that was over. He became an artist attached to nothing more profound than his facility and his fame. Although from time to time he still attempted the gravest subjects —as in *The Revolution* (1937) and *White Crucifixion* (1938)—he was no longer equal to them. Longevity conspired with a ghastly fluency to produce a mountainous oeuvre of clichés.

This is not, of course, Dr. Compton's view of the matter. She speaks of Chagall as "the greatest religious artist of our times." She doesn't, however, attempt to make a case for this extraordinary claim, and indeed, no very clear account of Chagall's religious beliefs is adduced to support it. Perhaps it is just another way of giving the artist the status of a "giant" without having to defend the claim on purely artistic grounds. Norbert Lynton is likewise much occupied with Chagall's role as a religious artist. What he offers us is a wildly misconceived rumination in which Chagall's putative religious outlook is compared with that of Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman. It would be hard to think of a less rewarding line of inquiry into the "meaning" of twentieth-century painting than this one, which carries the whole subject straight into the realm of absurdity. Which is where, I think, it is destined to remain if we insist on regarding Chagall—or, for that matter, either Rothko or Newman—as a significant figure in religious art or thought.

Implicit—but unacknowledged—in this attempt to confer a kind of religio-aesthetic sainthood on Chagall is a realization that on artistic grounds alone there is little to defend or reclaim in the long stretch of years that reaches from the early Twenties to the artist's death in 1985. The picture would not be quite so bleak, perhaps, if the best of Chagall's graphic art had been included in this retrospective—but that is probably material for another exhibition.

It was Marc Chagall's tragedy to become, early on in his long career, an artist orphaned by history. It is not for us to pretend that this tragedy had a happy ending.

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The adventures of Martin Green

by James W. Tuttleton

It isn't often that one is asked, in a volume of literary criticism, a question on the order of: what is the most important event in modern history? But this is precisely what Martin Green asks toward the end of his newest book, *The Great American Adventure.*[1] I shall return to his question in due course, but first let me say that this book, which the publisher describes as dealing with "action stories from Cooper to Mailer and what they reveal about American manhood," is not a work of historical analysis. It is instead a study of a dozen American adventure books seen as a reflection of America's "caste system" and her "imperialism," as these have shaped American "manliness."

In subjecting these cultural phenomena to a moral and political critique, Green offers a pretense of historical coverage by organizing his carefully selected books into the following triadic scheme: THREE FROM PHILADELPHIA—Cooper's *The Pioneers* (1823), Irving's *A Tour on the Prairies* (1832), and Robert Bird's *Nick of the Woods* (1837); THREE FROM BOSTON—Richard Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840), Melville's *Typee* (1846), and Parkman's *The Oregon Trail* (1849); THREE ANOMALIES—Kit Carson's *Autobiography* (1856), Twain's *Roughing It* (1872), and Theodore Roosevelt's *Autobiography* (1913); and THREE AESTHETES—Hemingway's *The Green Hills of Africa* (1935), Faulkner's "The Bear" (1942), and Mailer's *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (1967). What do these tales reveal to him?

According to Green, these stories disclose a common type of protagonist engaged in a series of exciting or violent events—often far from home or civilization—that call for "such virtues as courage, fortitude, cunning, strength, leadership and persistence." These virtues are claimed to be those of an "aristo-military caste," a caste derived from the European class system and implicitly supportive of it. The values of this caste are said by Green to be celebrated by our culture and acclaimed by these specific writers. Reading these books is recommended by the "Establishment" as a means of preparing boys to become leaders, rulers, and accomplished experts in the use of force. Green sees these authors as, in effect, servants and sponsors of American imperialist or nationalist objectives, which he describes as implicitly capitalist, anti-Christian, and anti-democratic. In consequence, he indicts them as complicit in our "immoral and violent expansionism."

Two personal observations in the "Foreword" of this book may help us to understand the astonishing premises of this study. First, Green—an Englishman by birth but a longtime professor at Tufts University—remarks that as boy and man he has always preferred domestic fiction to adventure tales. By domestic fiction he means the stories of O. Douglas, Charlotte Brontë, Mrs.

1 *The Great American Adventure,* by Martin Green; Beacon Press, 249 pages, $19.95.

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Gaskell, George Eliot, Jane Austen, and others who wrote what he calls the "serious novel": "stories about marriage and domesticity written in a form of moral realism, and woman-centered whereas adventure was man-centered." This preference made Green feel out of step with other boys: "I was not a manly boy." Second, Green is a practitioner of "an English school of criticism, whose major present exponent is Raymond Williams; it looks at literature with strong political and social concerns of a left-wing kind." (I think he means of a Marxist kind, but no matter.) To Green's left-wing political orientation is added something else. He has apparently been deeply affected by the radical moralism of Gandhi and the later Tolstoy, and he makes admiring references to "radical Christianity" (of a dissenting kind), to Quaker pacifism, and to Eastern nonviolence. What Tolstoy and Gandhi "would ask of a teacher of literature" also informs this critique of American adventure tales. The extraordinary intellectual gyrations by which Green has come to such a position over the past decade deserve some brief description.

After writing comparatively optimistic, if idiosyncratic, literary analysis in *A Mirror for Anglo-Saxons* (1960), *Reappraisals* (1965), and *The Problem of Boston* (1966), Green was apparently unhinged by the general convulsions of the Vietnam era. *Cities of Light and Sons of the Morning* (1972) showed a man embracing, as the subtitle suggests, "A Cultural Psychology for an Age of Revolution," while abandoning his Catholicism, optimism, and ambivalent love for his adopted country. Following *The Von Richtofen Sisters* (1974), and *Children of the Sun* (1976), Green launched himself into a trilogy of books under the general title *The Lust for Power*. Each would deal, he promised us, with the immorality of adventure and the exploitations of imperialism in the West. In the first of these, *The Challenge of the Mahatmas* (1978), he weighed Western civilization against the pacifist teachings of Gandhi and the later Tolstoy, the two "Mahatmas," and found it wanting. In the second, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (1979), he found English literature before 1918 to be the aesthetic support of an empire-building that created the moral and spiritual crisis of our times. In the third, *Tolstoy and Gandhi, Men of Peace: A Biography* (1983), he returned to his spiritual heroes for a "joint biography" of two models offering a single solution to the destructive pursuit of power in the West. That trilogy, however, has not exhausted the moral fervor of Green's literary analysis. *The Great American Adventure* puts American writing on the axis where Marx and the Mahatmas meet in Green's mind. Can the Marxist call to violent revolution and pacifist nonviolence be reconciled? On theoretical grounds alone, the project seems formidable.

Given his contradictory premises, it is not surprising that Green has no great admiration for the politics and morality of the adventure books in question, although he thinks them worth a "dialectical" unmasking. What we get, though, is principally the critical distortion produced by looking at them through pink spectacles. The distortions span a range from minor to major.

A minor distortion is Green's preposterous claim that Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper belong to "that Philadelphia school of writers that gave birth to American literature in the generation before Boston established its dominance as a writing and publishing center . . . ." As scholarship, this is nonsense. Both Irving and Cooper were deep-dyed New Yorkers. That printers in Philadelphia produced some of their books does not make them members of a Philadelphia school. There was no such school. To suggest this is on a par with describing Louis Auchincloss's Park Avenue and Wall Street fiction as Boston novels of manners because Houghton Mifflin is his publisher. Cooper and Irving selected publishers who promised satisfactory royalties and other benefits. Nor, to press this point further, is Melville a Boston author. Green knows this, for in his study of the literature of that city in Melville's time, *The Problem of Boston,* he scarcely mentions Melville. These

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misrepresentations are stupefying in a cultural historian of Green's wide reading.

His treatment of Cooper's *The Pioneers* offers an instance of how not merely the facts but the meaning of narrative facts can be distorted. According to Green, Cooper's "sense of values is based on adventure, manliness, and patriotism, and he gives Americans a picture of society that assigns a leading part to the aristo-military caste that embodies these values." These caste values are said to be embodied in Judge Temple, Oliver Edwards, and Natty Bumppo (Leather-stocking). To them is contrasted Elizabeth Temple, the Judge's daughter, whom Green astonishingly calls "the social and moral tuning fork" of the novel.

The central fictive issue in *The Pioneers* is the arrest of Natty Bumppo for shooting a deer in the teeming season. Cooper's point is the tension between the natural liberty that exists for the nomadic hunter in the wilderness and civilization's constraint upon it when the rise of settlements requires the institution of the law. Is Natty a glamorous aristo-military type? Hardly. A balding old man of seventy, sporting a single tusk of yellow bone, clad in ratty hunter's leggings, "Natty" is a near comic travesty of the vanishing woodsman. About the riskiest adventure in the novel is the hackneyed rescue of Elizabeth from a wild varmint in the woods. Elizabeth tells her father that Natty, her rescuer, ought to be pardoned of the charge against him. The Judge's reply, in view of Green's spurious claims for Elizabeth's values, deserves the greatest attention.

Elizabeth Temple argues that "those laws that condemn a man like Leather-stocking to so severe a punishment [one hour in the stocks, a $100 fine, and a month in jail], for an offence that even I must think venial, cannot be perfect in themselves." For the Judge, however, "the sanctity of the laws must be respected." "Society," he tells her, "cannot exist without wholesome restraints," and "it would sound ill indeed, to report that a judge had extended favour to a convicted criminal because he had saved the life of his child." Speaking *in propria persona,* Cooper says that Miss Temple spoke with "a logic that contained more feeling than reason." And into the Judge's mouth Cooper puts the concluding, decisive argument. After giving Elizabeth money to pay Natty's fine, the Judge remarks: "Thou hast reason, Bess, and much of it too, but thy heart lies too near thy head . . . ." He asks her to "try to remember, Elizabeth, that the laws alone remove us from the conditions of the savages; that he has been criminal, and that his judge was thy father." At the end of the novel, Leather-stocking strikes deeper into the wilderness, leaving civilization and its laws behind, unable to conform to these novel forms of legal socialization. Is the Judge an aristocrat? Only in the sense that he is an educated, thoughtful, and articulate spokesman for civilized values, defending the institution of the law and the rights of property. As Cooper's prose work *The American Democrat* (1838) makes plain, men of this type are democratic gentlemen. Green doesn't like gentlemen, however, for they imply the class structure, which defends property rights with the support of the military. But if the Judge's reasoning is an instance of the "aristo-military" mind, I can only commend it. Natural liberty is an interesting proposition in one's cozy study, but in the state of lawless nature, life is nasty, brutish, and short: it is every man for himself. We see this in Cooper's *The Prairie,* where certain frontiersmen, having pushed out too far from civilization, regress to barbarism and savagery. But Green thinks the century's natural fear of atavistic regression a mere capitalist's trick.

Many of the adventure stories dealt with by Professor Green pose just this kind of tension between anarchy and order, between the lawlessness encountered in the wilderness—or on the remote prairie, the high seas, or on a Polynesian isle—and the necessary legal codes of conduct that must be introduced when a society of men and women begins to form in that lawless space. In the real or fictive conflicts that result—whether with savage Indians, cannibals, mutinous sailors, or wild animals—most of

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these authors have preferred order to anarchy and have approved the imposition of humane law and even the judicious use of force, if necessary, to guarantee the conditions under which civilized existence can be nurtured. Professor Green has found the resultant society not worth the immoral price. He sees in the history of the expansion of Western civilization—through the Americas, Polynesia, and the Orient—a bloody record incompatible with Christian pacifism, Gandhian nonviolence, and universal brotherhood; and he has recoiled in disgust.

In any clime, co-existing with cannibals and Apaches, panthers and bears, has been harder in practice than the moral absolutist in his cozy study will allow. Consequently, Green falls back on the old accusation that "white culture is built on guns and explosives" (Cooper thought that it was built on liberty, law, and the rights of property). But for Green, "Officer or pioneer, the hero is a man of blood." This tiresome canard reminds us of another Englishman—D. H. Lawrence, who also reduced the typical American of our classic literature to the blue-eyed killer: "The essential American soul is hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer." Green finds the image of his disgust everywhere—in kindly Irving, in Dana, Faulkner, Mailer, and the rest. They are all complicit in glorifying the bloodlust, the social caste system, and capitalist extermination of aborigines. How could Green think otherwise of these books? As he has elsewhere said, our art "is so closely related to the military and technological intoxication of Western culture that even when it protests against the latter, it is implicated with it; simply to participate in that art prevents one from working against that culture."

So sweeping an indictment of course prevents Green from making any moral discriminations whatsoever. But for us the task of the ethical sensibility is precisely to make such moral discriminations, and in respect to most of these writers, Green's indictment can have little value. With Mailer, however, Green has got his target right in the center of the cross hairs. *Why Are We in Vietnam?* does legitimate, without remorse, the expression of murderous impulse, in Mailer's case as a means of discovering one's so-called "existential being." Even so, Green's reading of Mailer is off to the left, in its emphasis on aestheticism. Mailer's eccentric project is a moral one, involving a theology of Manichean struggle in the cosmos between God and the Devil; it cannot be rewritten as a project of "aestheticizing violence." Nor is it appropriate to claim such a project for Hemingway and Faulkner.

It is a hard saying but a true one that we live in a complex world of predation and death-dealing. Nature red in tooth and claw can horrify; and it will not change matters much if we euphemize this nature-system as an ecological food-chain, rather than calling it Darwin's grimmer arena of the "struggle for survival." (For this reason we need the law to restrain predation.) But if Hemingway and Faulkner ritualize the ubiquity of death-dealing, in their hunting stories, they do so in a religious rather than in an aesthetic way. Sam Fathers in "The Bear," and Ike McCaslin, his young protégé initiated into the hunter's code, both articulate a reverence for life—for all being—that is communicated in their sympathetic identification with the magnificent buck, the towering bear, and other such creatures, and in the guilt they feel upon killing them.

Something of the same religious identification with the order of being itself is expressed in Hemingway's elaborate rituals of hunting and fishing, not to speak of bullfighting. I cannot defend bullfighting here, but anyone opposed to this "sport" must engage with the evident fact that the rites and rules of the *corrida,* which have compelled the Mediterranean imagination for three thousand years, formalize the inevitability of death-dealing in a putatively moral and obscurely religious way. Like Faulkner, Hemingway expresses the immense pity of the human plight in knowing, consciously, its place in this scheme of predation. This pity is movingly expressed in *The Old Man and the Sea,* a work that Green avoids

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because it obviously cannot serve as fodder for his left-wing attack. Old Santiago loves and respects the fish he kills, calls it his brother, and begs its pardon as he reels it in. "Perhaps it was a sin to kill the fish," he thinks to himself, "even though I did it to keep me alive and feed many people." Later he thinks, "You did not kill the fish only to keep alive and to sell for food . . . . You killed him for pride and because you are a fisherman. You loved him when he was alive and you loved him after." He wonders, "If you love him, it is not a sin to kill him. Or is it more?" The moral meaning of such meditations—which point to the ineluctable fatality of the human condition in a world where life feeds on life—is beyond Green's understanding. He is dismissive of all such anguished moral struggles as so much rationalization.

Of course "The Bear" and *The Old Man and the Sea* may suggest a false primitivism, an extinct animism, a regression of the self to some pantheistic morality obsolete to urban critics like Green, who have left errant humanity behind for the higher planes of sainthood, where Mahatma Gandhi, Tolstoy, and Albert Schweitzer abide. But what do we do when the tsetse fly is about to bite, when the bear has killed the livestock, when one's family must be fed? For most of us there is no escaping some dimension of the human dilemma, however much it is disguised in city life. It will not serve to reduce this universal problem to the excesses of individualism, capitalism, and imperialism. Most of the American pioneers tried to be good Christians, but the doctrine of turning the other cheek—which worked with the British colonial administration in India—presented its problems to, let us say, the farmer from Yorkshire whom the Iroquois warrior had by the throat.

If such works in the adventure genre condone or aestheticize violence, what kind of fiction does Green admire? Though it is not discussed here, it is clear that Green most values the social novel, which deals with money, property, class, marriage, and the domestic scene. One may sympathize with this preference. James, Wharton, Austen, and George Eliot are artists of a major order. But even here rigid generic distinctions are perhaps unwise. Cooper wrote some of our best early novels of manners—for example, *Satanstoe* and *Home As Found*; and James's "The Beast in the Jungle" is an adventure tale transcendently superior to most of Green's examples. Indeed, as James remarked in "The Art of Fiction," "what *is* adventure, when it comes to that, and by what sign is the listening pupil to recognize it?" Green can recognize adventure only by tracking down the aristo-military type. But for James, the drama of a rejected marriage proposal was adventure incarnate. And as he remarked of Isabel Archer's midnight vigil, when she reflects on the failure of her marriage in *The Portrait of a Lady,* the "representation simply of her motionlessly *seeing,*" "the mere still lucidity of her act," was "as 'interesting' as the surprise of a caravan or the identification of a pirate."

It is true that the attempts by Howells, James, Wharton, and other novelists of manners to register the adventure of the mind, to catch the finer vibrations of the moral sense, may seem rarefied to readers demanding the kind of violent adventure reflected in the books here presented to us. Our appetite for them leads Green to characterize books of this kind—in the language of his mentor, F. R. Leavis—as "the great tradition, the central tradition, in American literature." But this formulation makes too much of the romance as *the* tradition. I for one think that the great tradition in America, as in England, is in the social novel and have so argued at some length in *The Novel of Manners in America.* But there is no denying that our frontier experience has produced its compelling fictive representations.

I find interesting Green's direct appeal to English teachers, especially feminists, to turn away from these adventure stories "toward others—those about 'strong women'—who can do more to build up the communal pride and energy of readers who want to resist imperialism and to change

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the meaning of 'America.'" Except for "The Bear," I suspect that the works of Green's "great tradition" of violent adventure are not widely taught, except perhaps in the odd doctoral seminar at Tufts.

In any case, if English teachers did transform the canon as Green proposes, that might really catapult us into what Ann Douglas has called "The Feminization of American Culture." This would appear to be Green's objective, for he has elsewhere quoted Gandhi's call for more feminized men: "I have repeated times without number that nonviolence is the inherent quality of women. For ages men have had training in violence. In order to become nonviolent they have to cultivate the qualities of women. Ever since I have taken to nonviolence, I have become more and more of a woman." No one can object to the growth of women's wise influence on American culture. Certainly our culture needs all the wisdom it can get—especially if the effect is a decline in violence. But what will be the case if, as I suspect, women readers and teachers admire adventure stories too, even as men admire good novels of manners? As James remarked in "The Art of Fiction": "There are some subjects which speak to us and others which do not, but he would be a clever man who should undertake to give us a rule—an *index expurgatorius*—by which the story and the no-story should be known apart."

It is perhaps a sign of the times that Green must be so apologetic about his preference for the novel of manners. The prisoner-of-sex syndrome seems to have affected other male critics as well. In a recent essay called "The Ways of a Wimp," the novelist Thomas Flanagan expresses uneasiness over his liking for Austen, Proust, and James because he thinks that Americans automatically identify such a preference with something less than full masculine intelligence and aesthetic understanding. Of course Flanagan doesn't consent to the charge of wimpiness, but the unease is there. Something of the same discomfort is suggested by a chapter title in Alfred Habegger's *Gender, Fantasy, and Realism in American Literature* (1982): it is called "Henry James and W. D. Howells as Sissies." Doubtless some adventure writing he-men, like Frank Norris and Jack London, disliked the domestic realism of Howells and James, with its "drama of a broken teacup, the tragedy of a walk down the block, the excitement of an afternoon call, the adventure of an invitation to dinner," as Norris described it. But Norris, London, and the others were merely trying to make a critical space for their own brand of fiction, a sensational naturalism intended to shock genteel Victorian America, or what was left of it. No wonder Alexander Harvey in *William Dean Howells* (1917) put Howells "at the head of the sissy school of American literature." But need anybody be troubled in his manhood by such macho posturing?

As it turns out, both Harvey and Habegger, as well as Green, commend the domestic realism of Howells and James. But one is frankly appalled at the morbid self-consciousness, the sexual anxiety, and the embrace of stereotypical thinking about manliness and womanliness still evident in these critics and projected by them onto the whole of American culture. I can see no necessary contradiction between the pleasures of a good narrative about a wilderness hunt and the pleasures of a domestic narrative about pride and prejudice.

A central issue here is of course the pleasure of the text. Green can get no pleasure from a novel in which an Indian or a cavalryman bites the dust, or in which the hunt for game in the wilderness turns sanguinary. He cannot have us read these narratives "with total assent or complicit enjoyment." But this position neither gives the author his *donnée* nor permits the reader any willing suspension of disbelief, even for the moment. Even further, Green's dour moralism imposes on us a view of literature like that in Tolstoy's "What Is Art?"—which insists that the only justification of art is its promotion of brotherhood and human happiness. But even beyond this dilemma, Tolstoy eventually renounced the vanity of literature, including his own, and Gandhi had no use whatsoever for the fruits of aesthetic inven-

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tion. Green is sincere enough to know that his continued preoccupation with art constitutes a rejection of the lesson of the Mahatmas, but he rationalizes his lecturing and writing about art as a mode of "contemplation," in which his unmasking of the literature of empire somehow saves his honor and redeems his refusal of their asceticism. But this activity is not contemplation, in the Eastern meaning. The renunciation commanded by Gandhi is quite plain: "All attachment to the senses is death." If Green cannot yet submit himself to it, which of us can, or would? Meanwhile, both the Tolstoyan and Marxist instrumental view of literature is hopelessly reductive of art's rich complexity of being. And the danger of this functional view of art is that it heads us in the direction of the *index expurgatorius,* with the clever left-wing authoritarian telling us what we cannot read.

Moreover, Green's moralism runs counter to the whole affective psychology of "violence in art." I have in mind here Aristotle's remark, in the *Poetics,* that such is the pleasure of poetic *mimesis,* or imitation, that "objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity: such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and of dead bodies." Likewise, Sidney in "An Apology for Poetry" speaks of "the sweet violence of tragedy." And Dr. Johnson remarks that "the delight of tragedy proceeds from our consciousness of fiction; if we thought murders and treasons real they would please no more." Wallace Stevens has even suggested, in *The Necessary Angel,* that the literature of violence, when it attains unto true aesthetic nobility, may have a genuine existential value: "It is a violence from within that protects us from a violence without. It is the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality. It seems, in the last analysis, to have something to do with our self-preservation; and that, no doubt, is why the expression of it, the sound of its words, helps us to live our lives."

But Green won't draw a line between fiction and reality. He would make us feel guilty for the pleasure we take in literature's capacity to represent life, including life's violence. That capacity, for him, amounts to aesthetic hedonism, literature as "a pleasure garden for the socially privileged." Like Plato, or like the clever literary commissars of the left wing whose politics Green espouses, he would deny such pleasurable adventure stories and admit to his Utopia only tales that emphasize the pastimes of the domestic circle, the joys of economic production, the drama of social justice triumphant, the elimination of class conflict. These themes are, for Green, expressive of *the most important event in modern history,* which he identifies—following "Sartre and most Marxists (and most modern intellectuals)"—as "Europe's industrialization of its economy."

I must confess here to a sense of deflation at the answer to this great question. I do not know who these "modern intellectuals" are, and no rational argument for this astonishing proposition is offered. I think that the industrialization of Europe's economy was a fine thing, and I note that it was done without Marx's help, thanks to aggressive entrepreneurs trying to build a better mousetrap. But the whole context of *The Great Adventure* has led us to believe that westward expansion is the major event in modern history. Green will have none of this, however, because to assent to the literature of expansion is to recognize the rise of civilization in wilderness and prairie, the extension of law, the creation of wholesome socialized existence where once there was anarchy and savagery. This grand movement, afoot since 1492, is what we call the advance of Western civilization, and Green detests it for its ideology of personal liberty, its individualistic energy and success, its acceptance of private property, and its resignation to the inescapable fact, on the individual level, of human inequality. Behind this book's detestation of Western civilization is a racist self-loathing, reflected in his approving quotation, in *The Challenge of the Mahatmas,* of Susan Sontag's calumny that "The white

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race *is* the cancer of human history." Behind Green's book lies an undeclared romance with the utopian antithesis of the West, never quite defined, which would seem to inhere in the world of Tolstoy's simple peasants, in the Quakers' now defunct Holy Experiment in Pennsylvania (1682-1775), or in the ashrams of the nonviolent Gandhians now in India.

Can Green's Gandhism be reconciled with his left-wing political sympathies, with what he calls "Marx and his revenge, his call to action, to praxis, to political rising"? This book certainly fails to harmonize them, and hardly even tries to do so. For as Green confessed in *The Challenge of the Mahatmas,* "Marxism-modernism is no option for a man opposed to violence; and Gandhism is antiintellectual and antiaesthetic." Hence Green has painted himself into a corner from which he cannot escape, and the present book reflects this paralysis. The sensible option would be to abandon his Marxism, but Green prefers to hang onto it, despite its call to violence.

When Marx has had his revenge, when such left-wing revolutions have broken out, men of moral conscience, of pacifist belief, and of Christian conviction have been some of the first to be liquidated as reactionary vestiges of obsolete bourgeois morality. One of the greatest moral abominations of modern history was the wholesale slaughter of millions of Tolstoy's peasants, civil servants, doctors, merchants, artists, liberal humanists, and even dedicated Marxist functionaries—and their wives and children—in the name of that left-wing ideology that Green cannot abandon. In *The Challenge of the Mahatmas,* Green confesses: "I could not describe even theoretically the kind of political radicalism that I could subscribe to authentically." When we think about how democracies perish, this kind of intellectual confusion is instructive. In view of the social wreckage produced by Marxist revolutions in this century, no one pretending to call himself a liberal humanist can ignore the ways in which the theory of political radicalism has created an intolerant and repressive Marxist praxis. By every rational, religious, and humanly civilized criterion, that ideology has proven itself totally and horridly bankrupt. We need a better dream of the future; the Marxist past, in all its bloody actuality, is a nightmare.

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Henri Rousseau and the idea of the naïve

by Rackstraw Downes

Eumaeus, Homer's swineherd, is surely the only person in the *Odyssey* who is totally without guile. Respectful, loyal, hospitable, conscientious, he lives in the hills in a hut he built for himself adjoining his pigsties; he avoids the town and considers the influence of the court as corrupting. His character indicates that culture's wistful love affair with what it called nature, the idea of the natural, must be very old, no doubt as old as culture itself.

This idea supposes a condition which existed before culture, and continues to exist outside of it and in contrast to it; the love of the natural also includes the thought, if it does not originate with it, that something may easily go wrong with what is too deliberately cultivated. Far from being merely the product of romanticism, this is expressed in the structure of language; from "art" derives "artificial," from "craft" "crafty," and Eumaeus first appears, no doubt with intention, right after that very worldly moment where Athena, simultaneously shocked and tickled to discover that Odysseus is telling her an elaborate lie, notes with pleasure that in terms of their talents for tactical deception he and she are a match for each other. Homer later reveals that this swineherd was a king's son, stolen when "so high" and sold into slavery. Was this elaboration of his character motivated by doubts as to whether such a person could really exist without breeding, the way some sceptics refuse to believe that Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare?

This seems likely, because in fact, as soon as it gets past a mere hypothetical yearning after nature, culture invariably reveals hesitations, ambivalencies, scruples. Like a dynasty, culture sometimes welcomes energy from outside itself, but it is also concerned to refine and protect itself. Roughly, the nineteenth century, with its taste for the exotic as well as the natural, was involved with the former, and the eighteenth century with the latter. C. S. Lewis remarked of the Tory writers like Pope and Swift that "the number of things they did not want to hear about is enormous." The Whig Addison, on the other hand, "wants to hear about everything." Still, his is a carefully defended inquisitiveness. When he writes about the old Border ballad *Chevy Chase,* product not of his own neo-classical culture but of a popular oral tradition, he does not praise it for enlarging the scope of his own taste at all; on the contrary, he defends it precisely by demonstrating that it passes all the tests of classical criticism. Thoreau, on the other hand, uses the contrivance of good writing to urge an uncontrived way of life, perhaps as an exit from, and certainly as a critique of, his own culture. In *Walden* he has an experience with an odd reflexive irony to it. This writer who wants to try a life divested of culture, meets in the process "a true Homeric or Paphlagonian man" whose own culture is so rudimentary as to be effectively nonexistent. Thoreau is intrigued, and becomes fiercely observant of this Canadian

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wood chopper. He is a discovery. One senses Thoreau's admiration, but it is underlain by mystification: "To a stranger he appeared to know nothing of things in general, yet I sometimes saw in him a man whom I had not seen before, and I did not know whether he was as wise as Shakespeare or as simply ignorant as a child, whether to suspect him of a fine poetic consciousness or of stupidity." It is as though Thoreau, meeting someone from the very country he himself is headed for, is perplexed as to whether he has found anything of value or not. He goes on: "A townsman told me that when he met him sauntering through the village in his small close-fitting cap and whistling to himself he reminded him of a prince in disguise." Here is the same image Homer used. Thoreau, trying to put his finger on nature itself, finds himself accounting for it as a clandestine form of culture. This implies that nature subjected to analysis is impenetrable, or it evaporates.

Schiller in his essay "Naïve and Sentimental Poetry" accepts this impenetrability as a given. This essay, which Thomas Mann called "the greatest of all German essays," divides all of poetry into two kinds over this issue of culture's fascination with the natural. Poets who live in a healthy, youthful society think and feel naturally, they themselves *are* nature; while poets who live in an artificial society *seek* the natural. The first are naïve, the second sentimental. Schiller's opening paragraphs constitute a searching inquiry into the phenomenon of the naïve. Nature itself Schiller leaves alone; he discusses it in terms of its affect, of the particular kind of emotion it produces in us, and the conditions under which the emotion is provoked. This approach seems inevitable: since nature consists precisely in what is not contrived, it cannot be aware of itself, nor does it define itself in ways that are perceptible to culture. "Nature," says Schiller, "considered in this wise, is for us nothing but the voluntary presence, the subsistence of things on their own, their existence in accordance with their own immutable laws." He goes on to make these points:

1) The appeal of the natural in objects or in human behavior is not aesthetic but moral. To demonstrate this he borrows an image from Kant; if we are enjoying the song of a nightingale and discover that it is actually only an imitation, our enjoyment, and the emotion Schiller is defining, would disappear. The natural appeals to us because of an idea it represents, not because of—and often in spite of—the form it takes.

2) The idea represented in natural objects—"the serene spontaneity of their activity"—is both an image of our own lost childhood and, as it reveals to us the unnatural in ourselves, an ideal toward which we aspire. Yet the perfection of these objects "is not to their credit because it is not the product of their choice. They accord us then the quite unique delight of being our example without putting us to shame."

3) When the love of the natural is occasioned by the presence of children and childlike folk we look upward, from the awareness of what has become actual in ourselves, at the potential that is in them. "In the child *disposition* and *determination* are represented; in us that *fulfilment* that forever remains far short of those."

4) When what we take to be naturalness makes us feel the restraint or artificiality—the invalidity—of culture, this indicates the presence of the naïve. This presence provokes

> those mixed feelings which the *naïve* mode of thought excites in us. It connects *childlike* simplicity with the *childish*; through the latter it exposes its weakness to the understanding and causes that smile by which we betray our (theoretical) superiority. But as soon as we have cause to believe that childish simplicity is at the same time childlike, that in consequence not of lack of understanding, not incapacity, but rather a higher strength, a heart full of innocence and truth, is the source of that which out of its inner greatness scorns the aid of art, then that triumph of the understanding is set aside, and mockery of ingenuousness yields to admiration of simplicity. We feel ourselves obliged to respect the object at which we formerly smiled, and since we at the same

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> time cast our glance upon ourselves, bemoan the fact that we are not likewise endowed. Thus arises the entirely unique phenomenon of a feeling in which joyous mockery, respect, and melancholy are compounded.

The twentieth-century taste for naïve art is a twist in the long story of this ancient antithesis of culture and nature, and what Schiller had to say about the naïve in 1795 is apropos today. The naïve in naïve art is not there by virtue of what the picture represents, since a naïve action or sentiment could just as well be depicted in a sophisticated painting. Rather, an equation is made between an unknowing technique and a pure heart. Thus, Philippe Soupault: "In order to paint Rousseau dipped his brush in his heart." If one can ignore the saccharine content in this metaphor, there is a point being made—the opposite of the one George Orwell was making about Salvador Dalí when he spoke of "a dexterity that goes no higher than the elbow." Rousseau bypasses the artifice in the arm.

In naïve art, then, style is a fixed moral issue; therefore it must be made clear that the unknowingness of the technique is not counterfeit, that it did not come about through laziness, incompetence, or contempt for the culture of painting, but through a true lack of awareness of what the culture is and how to acquire it. Much of the writing about naïve art consists of anecdotes about the artist's way of life and his distance from any cultural milieu, whether it be Wilhelm Uhde picking his way through some working-class Parisian *quartier* in search of the postman Vivin, or Elizabeth Bishop on some seedy block in Key West finding her first Gregorio Valdes in a barbershop window. The point is to establish the existence of an unbridgeable gap between the sources of culture and the place and frame of mind in which these artists work. The writer draws back the curtain to reveal that the nightingale—the nightingale of Schiller's example—is not an imitation. The seemingly discursive, picturesque writing confers on the artist exactly the opposite of an art school diploma or a fine arts degree, and it puts us in a frame of mind to enjoy the work, as Schiller puts it, "not because it gratifies our senses, nor yet because it satisfies our understanding or taste (the very opposite can occur in both instances), rather, simply *because it is nature.*"

Apart from the circumstantial evidence, though, it will be those moments in a naïve painting that proclaim the artist's ignorance—moments which might be taken in a sophisticated painting merely to reveal the artist's defects—that aver his genuine naïveté. This makes the question of what constitutes quality in naïve art quite problematic. Nevertheless, the artist's resourcefulness at such moments might be inspired, and will in any event give the painting its character. Also at issue is the question of intention. If naïveté consists in ignorance of the culture and isolation from it, how can naïve art demonstrate any definite character in relation to it? The naïve artist cannot intend his work as progressive, conservative, romantic, provincial, or whatever without understanding the layout of the existing culture—at which point he is no longer naïve.

There has always been ample confusion about the quality and intention—the character—of the work of Henri Rousseau, subject of an important retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.[1] In his own day many Paris critics took him for a joke, while certain avant-garde artists and intellectuals were fascinated by him. Was he a naïve? Was he a Salon artist manqué? Was it that he "instinctively painted in the manner of four hundred years earlier?" Or is it that his style is only "apparently naïve" and that the

1 "Henri Rousseau," which originated at the Grand Palais in Paris, will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art until June 4. Carolyn Lanchner and William Rubin, of MOMA's Department of Painting and Sculpture, developed the exhibition, together with Michel Hoog of the Musee de l'Orangerie in Paris. The exhibition's catalogue, *Henri Rousseau,* was published by MOMA: 280 pages, $40 hardbound, $15 paper.

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character of his work "clearly places him within the Post-Impressionist, Symbolist orbit?"[2]

Rousseau was an autodidact, he got no painting culture from any formal training. But this in itself does not make him a real nightingale. The British painter Francis Bacon is self-taught, but there is no question of his having failed to absorb the culture, nor of his painting lacking a definite character in relation to it. But the radically different opinions about the fundamental nature of Rousseau's art indicate that it has not found itself a clear-cut place. The definition of his art remains contested and contestable.

On entering the Rousseau show after looking at the work of his contemporaries what is immediately striking is the effect of brittleness everywhere. His forms acquire little weight in the middle or thickness at the edge. The earliest paintings, from the late 1880s, are three medium-sized woodland scenes, the execution of which is meticulous; one is a winter nocturne and it especially aspires to a degree of finish one associates with Salon painting. The woods take the form of a flat plane of trees, their branches or sparse foliage fanning out against the sky; quite small figures are placed flatly against these trees near their foot so that problems of spatial construction or the depiction of volumes are kept to a minimum. But there are awkwardnesses about the little figures, and the faces especially tend toward the simplistic. They are fancifully dressed; in one painting, the heads of a couple kiss in a diamond-shaped area which is framed by twigs and lit more brightly than the rest of the picture. These pictures, in their invariably clear-cut contours, the enumeration of each stereotyped leaf, the stylized swellings and undulating curves of the limbs of trees, and in the distinct feeling of *displacement,* as though one is not sure where one is—watching in memory some melodrama in a small-town theater, perhaps, where the conventions are all familiar but the lighting unnatural—emphasize decoration, costume, sentiment. In this, they distinguish themselves totally from any avant-garde nineteenth-century French painting that represents the outdoors; lacking the skills of the Salon, they reveal a taste one might call popular. Though more modest, more fastidious, and more graceful in a conventional way than the bulk of Rousseau's work, they are an indicative prelude to it.

Myself, Portrait-Landscape (1890) is Rousseau's first large, assertive painting. It is a picture of contradictions, and of stops and starts. The figure of the artist himself, as has often been pointed out, floats in front of the landscape in a quite different scale so that, in spite of the number of recognizable details, we are not in a world of realism. Nor, in spite of the artist's black suit, painted flat and with much attention to contour, are we in a congruous, connected world of flatness such as Gauguin had already developed. Elements that belong to the two different scales of the painting are not linked as the saints, donors, interiors, and landscapes all in different scales are linked—with sophisticated virtuosity—by a fifteenth-century "primitive." Nor are they contrasted to any telling effect, either in terms of form or imagery; in fact, there is enough indefiniteness about this conjunction that even those who wish it were deliberate can only describe it as "almost surely" so. The size of the figure has been drastically reduced, shortened from top down and bottom up, and narrowed from both sides. Was this done to reduce the disparity of scale between figure and landscape? In any event, in making his corrections, Rousseau did not bring the new sky color with which he narrowed the suit area down between the chimneys on the left of it or behind the trees on the right of it; he stopped short of those objects, leaving them against the original lighter sky. This is odd in a painting with much careful workman-

2 These points of view have been, or are, held by respectively: Wilhelm Uhde, a contemporary art dealer and writer who befriended Rousseau; Dora Vallier, author of a Rousseau *catalogue raisonné*; Kenneth Clark; and Carolyn Lanchner and William Rubin, authors of "Rousseau and Modernism," an essay in the catalogue to the present show.

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ship in it, but it indicates that for Rousseau contiguity is no more a leading concern than congruity. Nor is proximity; does the shape of the beret resemble that of the cloud right next to it to any purpose? What can be said for certain is this: each has its own peculiar character as an isolated thing.

Here we meet the underlying assumption of Rousseau's mind, and the source of that brittleness that distinguishes his work. Things are not brought to an end, they stop dead at the contour; they do not positively attract or repel what is in front, behind, or next to them. Although they are not really heading anywhere, they bump into one another—because they live in a world of one-thing-at-a-time. Things in this picture are no more subject to modification by nature than they are by a firm idea of art. Space, volume, light, movement, wind, gravity, density, air mostly have no pronounced effect on Rousseau's objects; if they do it is an erratic, piecemeal one. His things are all on display in some sort of final form, logos of their own identities, insignia of themselves. Each one contributes its own bit of information. Rousseau's palette does not rest on his arm as it would when he works, it is tilted parallel to the picture's surface, so the names of his first and second wives can be clearly read. All the flags on the ship extend neatly out in a nonexistent wind, like the flags on the ships of John and James Bard, so they too can be clearly read. Rousseau's eyes and eyebrows are not attached to any imagined form of the skull, they stare out from the surface with mesmeric ferocity. In other pictures one sees that a red sun or a white moon is a fact not a force, it has no effect on anything. And in the one picture where the wind does blow, *Surprise!* (1891), it creates no confusion, but bends each leaf, branch, and blade of grass separately; nothing moves, and rain appears not as something that wets these objects, but as a separate sign of itself, in parallel strokes of dark varnish added after everything else.

If Rousseau paints each object with attention to its separate nature, so in choosing his imagery he selects things that have their own preexistent meaning, in the popular culture for instance, or the established facts of his own biography: the artist's beret, stereotypical sign of his profession—what other painter of the time showed himself wearing this stage prop?—or the Eiffel Tower, latest engineering wonder. He poses himself on one of the *quais* which he knew from patrolling them as a toll collector. His picture is an inventory of fixed symbols. What he paints is not what he discovers for himself in the continuum of life, which he then imbues with personal meaning, but what is already posing for him, and he accepts the face it puts on. His landscapes, as Tristan Tzara pointed out, are "souvenir landscapes"; they record some local landmark, some neighborhood spot. His mind is thoroughly exoteric, he paints what everyone knows—the regimental portrait, the latest fad in sports. His imagery, by the time of his self-portrait, has already divided itself into the realistic and the poetic; reality is a matter of pre-selected, accepted signs. Poetry—and this is also a conventional idea—is what is exceptional and someplace else; it comes in costume in the woods, and later on it will find its way to the jungle or the desert. Underlying the eccentric appearance of his paintings, Rousseau's imagery expresses the mind of an ordinary man with his daydreams.

The literalism of Rousseau's rain is found throughout his paintings in different, inconsistent forms. The connection between the real object and the flat canvas is a direct one; it bypasses the metaphor of any encompassing form. Leaves in the jungle, instead of turning their backs to the sun, turn them parallel to the canvas; flowers are seen in exact profile or from overhead, each bloom distinct. Trees which are too far away to allow their individual leaves to be represented turn into a kind of clogged texture, which often contrasts with the weightlessly flat surfaces of nearby buildings. When there are many things repeated like the windows in *Myself,* or the artists in *Liberty,* they get onto the canvas by a rubber-stamp procedure; there is no concept of such a thing as summary. But the literal flatness of the

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canvas has an opposite effect on volumetric forms; it creates bits of isolated metaphor without a context, and these account for some of Rousseau's most astonishing and fascinating successes: the provocative shapes of black dogs, striped cats, or striped football players, the black snake charmer, the horse in *War,* or the puffed-up shoulders of a lady at a wedding, and the bride's outrageous veil. These ungainly and aggressive things can be repellent, laughable, and wonderful at the same time. They are not only to be found in Rousseau, though. The larger of the two standing portraits of women is reminiscent of the colonial American portraitist Pieter Vanderlyn. Both artists deploy the huge flat fixed-contour shapes of their model's dresses in a similar way, fitting them on the canvas as a carpenter uses a board, wasting little. This shape they contrast with the decorative patterning of small flowers or floral patterns; and in both the faces are finished, with emphatic calligraphic elegance and barely any modeling, into an immobile certainty. The meaning of the resemblance can hardly be mistaken. We are looking at painting which uses only a primary vocabulary, with hardly any sense of metaphor. Anyone who has ever taught painting to a class of absolute beginners will recognize the symptoms. However, the comparison also shows Rousseau's extraordinary power: his imagination, his facility, his wit, his ambition, his panache compared to Vanderlyn's thin, stiff charm.

But it is impossible to mistake Rousseau for a deliberate master who preferred to work with this limited vocabulary, for he does not extrapolate from his successes. At the very end of his life in *The Dream* (1910) he paints a sonorously deep green cardboard jungle whose animal population is contained by a meshwork of foliage and flowers. To this he adds the unforeseen invention of Yadwigha on her couch floating in from stage-right like a diva on a gondola. But the nude itself is disappointing; ugly in the extremities, she has been subjected to poor and feeble modeling. One longs for some Modigliani to bring a released sensuousness to this figure without destroying her flatness. But if one were to start tampering with the nude, what is one to do with the storybook lions or the paper parrot? The picture lives by benefit of the accord between its naïve vision and its naïve technique, clues which leave us realizing that we cannot be any better satisfied than by its unrealization and its unreality.

It is interesting to follow Rousseau as a painter of landscapes. Given his predilection for literalism, and for flattening volumes into shapes, the depiction of the horizontal foreground planes of landscape will be a test of his inventiveness, and of how aware he was of the consequences of his style. *House on the Outskirts of Paris* is a good example. On the left of the painting Rousseau conceals much of his ground plane behind a low wall of short vegetation and three trees, and all the planes on this side read vertical. On the right he describes a road which runs straight ahead into the picture as though he were looking at it from well up in the air; it reads like a steep incline, spliced not too obtrusively to the side of a house in the middle of the picture. The side-by-side contrast of these two different approaches to space gives the pleasurable jolt of an unexpected solution. But it needs to be compared to, say, de Chirico's use of a rather similar construction in *Gare Montparnasse (The Melancholy of Departure)* (1914), where it becomes an element in the hands of a virtuoso whose architectonics are the source of his disturbing poetry. The Rousseau is dated c. 1902. In two landscapes of 1908, however, Rousseau has not explored any consequences of his idea. In *The Quai of Ivry* and its companion *The Fisherman and the Biplane,* the water and its embankment rise up disturbingly in front of the houses like the town walls of Lucca. And while the dirigible in the first picture floats beautifully through the air in perfect tonal pitch, the biplane in the second is a pasted-on catastrophe. In yet other landscapes like *River Bank* (1890) and *Flamingos* (1907), Rousseau bypasses construction by reducing the composition to a

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set of more or less parallel horizontal bands. *River Bank* has a shy, antique look, but in *Flamingos* Rousseau's imagination is liberated by his maneuver; painting four independent groups of signs with a mythopoeic simplicity, he gets a preposterous, tall-story effect. This is travel for the untravelled, travel as in childhood we thought it ought to be, fantastic travel as in Mandeville.

In his landscape constructions, then, Rousseau oscillates between the inventive, the defective, and the circumventive, without building on his discoveries, without making progress. In delighting in his successes one could say with Schiller that "their perfection is not to their credit because it is not the product of their choice."

In his jungle pictures which began around 1904-05, Rousseau reverts to the vertically oriented solution of his early woodland scenes, though often on a vast, commanding scale and with an entirely new flamboyance to the imagery. The whole canvas is covered with vegetation. In his catalogue essay "Rousseau in his Time," Michel Hoog compares these paintings to the completely covered canvasses of Monet's waterlillies or Cézanne's woods pictures of the park at Château Noir. But such a comparison draws attention to the fundamental differences. In Monet and Cézanne the surface of the canvas is a metaphor for space, a space which is envisaged as a preexistent, pliant whole; it can be infinitely modified and inflected in any place at any moment. Monet's stroke grazes imagined veils, varying their density, transparency, or luminosity. Cézanne turns and turns his edges so they thicken to an insistent palpability and weight. With both these artists imagery and space are simultaneous functions of one another. In Rousseau's jungles there is no vision of any space like that; space is a wall which remains scarcely modified as the ivy of his imagery spreads all over, unit by added unit, pressing flat against it. It is the natural solution for an artist to whom construction is an onus and who is, unlike the impassioned observers Monet and Cézanne, an armchair traveller whose imaginary voyages are set in motion by leafing through the *National Geographic*; it gives Rousseau full license to let fantasy and decoration take over. Rousseau's jungles are best when they are most flat and frontal as in *The Hungry Lion* with the red sun now looming behind the foliage, *The Merry Jesters* or *The Snake Charmer*.

In the catalogue essay by Carolyn Lanchner and William Rubin, "Rousseau and Modernism," Rousseau's work is placed "within the Post-Impressionist, Symbolist orbit." To get it there, comparisons are made to Seurat and Gauguin. But the resemblances drawn are superficial and fortuitous; they are not the resemblances of genus or species. The Post-Impressionists all severally invented a grammar of the whole painting; this grammar modified all the forms in their pictures. Equally, insofar as these forms can be considered as modifications of a naturalistic vision, they all help define the character of this grammar of the whole. This is not the case with Rousseau. His most unified pictures, his jungles, are not governed by any whole metaphor of space and form; they are held together by exclusion of any kind of form that might violate their inflexible frontality, and by the repeated piled-up overlappings of homogenous units of vegetation. Lanchner and Rubin also argue that Rousseau was a deliberate stylist who cultivated his naïve manner on purpose (in his life they allow him to have been really naïve). In framing their argument they attach great significance to Rousseau's little landscape sketches which they call "competent, even expert, impressionistic works," and which they take as proof that Rousseau could have worked in a different style had he wanted to. I seriously doubt this. In the first place, their description of these sketches is inaccurate. The sketches show no assimilation of Impressionism, being extremely dark, and exhibiting no concept of cast light or broken color. Rousseau does, however, generalize and summarize a bit within the different areas and leave their edges ragged and sometimes blur them, things he does nowhere else in his work. But these are nothing more than the natural, if not inev-

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itable, results of working rapidly on a very small scale on projects which are only preparatory. If there were similar, more developed works on a larger scale one could, if one needed to, contend that Rousseau entertained the alternative of working either in a loose or a tidy manner, but no such works seem to exist. All the larger paintings that derive from the sketches are in fact organized into tidy, separated forms as a result of the equation Rousseau makes—typical of naïve painters—between the distinctness of each part and the finish of the whole. Lanchner and Rubin's argument is forced; their account of the work of this artist whom Dora Vallier called "an intruder" has an altogether Addisonian flavor to it; in effect they are saying "If Rousseau is interesting it must be possible to demonstrate that he is not a naïf but really a modernist."

The sophisticated artist who made an encompassing style out of the same characteristic that forms the basis of Rousseau's art was Miró. His series of paintings, beginning about 1918, of which *The Farm* (1922-24) is the best known, are made out of separately individualized units like Rousseau's. But Miró's compositions have none of the uncertainty about space that Rousseau exhibits when obliged to construct. Miró takes the implication of a device such as Rousseau used in *House on the Outskirts of Paris* and develops it into a principle of style: each thing is presented so as best to display its ultimate personality, whether that means looking at it in profile, or from slightly above or below, or from due overhead. In such a context any "wrong" perspective will look clearly deliberate, lending character, not uncertainty, to the whole. As Al Held once remarked of *The Farm,* "every object is in its own space." Miró admired Rousseau's work, and these paintings make a profound comment on its essential character as well as being a criticism of its indefiniteness. This relationship between these two artists might be taken to parallel the one Schiller perceives between the *disposition* of a child and the *fulfillment* of an adult.

Surely one of the first and best aestheticians of naïve art was Shakespeare. Many of his best-loved low-life characters, like Dogberry and Verges or "bully Bottom," show how inadvertent inventiveness may spring from ignorance and ineptitude. In the naïve play of "Pyramus and Thisbe" from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the personifications of Wall and Moonshine are examples of this, and surely they would have appealed to Alfred Jarry much as Rousseau's *War* did. The Angel of Liberty and the Lion of Courage in *Liberty Inviting Artists to Take Part in the Twenty-second Exhibition of the Société des Artistes Indépendants* (1906), or the Muse in *The Muse Inspiring the Poet* (1909) are the somewhat schooled cousins of Moonshine and Wall. They introduce a level of humor into two pictures which might easily have become creaking contraptions of pompous attic allegory. But at the same time we must also remember that Shakespeare was not Peter Quince. In Shakespeare's (as opposed to Quince's) play the necessary clues are all in place for an audience to have a shared feeling about the overall tone. Such controls are not operating in the *Muse* or *Liberty* of Rousseau. No doubt Rousseau, whose whole life's ambition depended on the unjuried shows of the Indépendants for any sort of fulfillment, meant his *Liberty* sincerely. No doubt also that we appreciate not only the comic effect of the lion and the angel but the irony of all these independent painters dressed in uniform and each carrying a canvas of identical size. It is a satire on artists out of *The New Yorker.* The picture we actually see is mock-heroic, and because of that the pomposity inherent in Rousseau's presentation of his sentiment is dissipated and the picture carried by his brilliant patterns and decorative flair. It is one of his most sophisticated performances, comparable in its literary tone to the Restoration heroic plays which succeed, as William Empson pointed out, because "they are so close to their parodies." However, the literary sophistication of this picture cannot be considered intentional, because the appearance of some of the animals and figures in Rous-

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seau's jungle scenes, which also derives from ineptitude, produces only a crippling effect of bathos.

In *War* there is no such problem. The *genre* of this wonderful picture is the grotesque, therefore any awkwardness or ugliness contributes to its effect. It belongs to a clan of images that includes Breughel's *Dulle Griet* and Posada's *Calavera de Don Quixote.* It makes one regret that Rousseau resorted more and more to the repetitious *horror vacui* of his walls of jungle vegetation and the concomitant stasis of their fauna. Here the marvelous horse, its underside skating along the horizon, is stretched right out across the canvas all striving head and legs and trailing tail, moving against an opposing pattern of tilted verticals, the sky filled with Bellona's smoking firebrand and the red clouds of horror, so much more intense than the cliché suns and moons—one, alas, with a face in it—of Rousseau's "exotics." This is the zenith of his mythopoeia. Below it, the blue sky of his wedding, the white sails of his boats, his regiment, his flamingoes, and his dream, form a galaxy of images whose categorical conceptions make available to us again the emotions of childhood; not, as Schiller would have said, sentimentally by depicting them, but actually, by embodying them in the form of the painting.

It is a pity in a way that Jarry commissioned Rousseau himself to make the lithograph of *War* for his and de Gourmont's magazine *L'Ymagier,* for the result was rather tame. One wonders what Posada would have made of it. The thought raises some interesting questions. Posada's art is much more secure than Rousseau's in technique, in artistic conception and in its social meaning. It is not naïve art but folk art, that is to say, for the people as well as by the people. These two categories have recently been lumped together, an Edward Hicks classed with a John Kane. Hicks, like Posada, was an assured artist, he had a workshop training in decorative painting (carriage doors, inn signs) and his work expressed a clear-cut Quaker ideology. There is probably a Durkheimian principle to be invoked here; artist and audience understood each other in one another's terms. Rousseau's world was nothing like so clearly defined. As Dora Vallier pointed out, his artistic ambitions split him off from his own working-class world, but he did not belong either in the artistic milieu to which his work had introduced him. Rousseau is often depicted as a man who painted only for the love of painting, another Ryder, but something else emerges from the facts of his biography which have been coming to light plentifully over the last twenty years. He may or may not have been, as Gertrude Stein put it, "a little small colourless frenchman with a little beard like any number of frenchman one saw everywhere," but he was certainly a man with enormous dreams, not just of tropical forests—that was the least of it—but of a glorious artistic career. There is only the meagerest record of any painting activity on Rousseau's part until the Prix de Rome winner and former director of the School of Fine Arts in Lyon, Felix Clément, moved to the house next door to Rousseau. The same year Rousseau painted a battle scene over a tracing taken from an engraved magazine illustration; two years later Clément helped to get Rousseau a copyist's card for the Louvre, something that would otherwise not have been so easy to come by. From his very first showing at the Indépendants he subscribed to a press-clipping service and pasted every notice of his work, however insulting, in a copy book. When the service sent him an announcement that a different Henri Rousseau, a Salon painter, had been awarded the Silver Medal, Rousseau had this title printed on his card. He had the vision of himself as a complete artist. He volunteered to teach at the Philotechnic Association, (where his pupils were mostly working men); there was the writing and publishing of a waltz, the writing and attempt to publish two plays, the *soirées* with their formal invitations, the letters to the state requesting a subsidy or the purchase of his exhibited works; and the explanations

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that, had his parents perceived his talent and educated him properly, he would be one of the foremost artists in the nation.

The contrast between Rousseau's "Salon-struck" ambition and his preparation, his equipment for the career he desired, is one of the fascinating things about him; the contrast holds in terms of what he really managed to assimilate from the painting culture as opposed to what he attempted in his work; the huge scale, the elaborateness, the variety in his imagery and his undertakings not only totally distinguish him from any other naïve, but they make him something of a trapeze artist without a net, a risk-taker, in comparison with whom a Hicks or a Posada is altogether convention-bound. So that, without deliberately striving for any revolutionary goals like the artists of the avant-garde, it gives him a certain chance spiritual affiliation with them. But the nature of his work and what it came to mean to these artists are two different things. (The latter is explored in great detail by Lanchner and Rubin.) The little twin portraits of Rousseau and his wife that Picasso owned, and always kept by him, have less artistry than the worst recent "Bad Painting." They have none of the cause and effect of a deliberate style, they bypass form-making, they are as indefinite as the conjunction of figure and landscape in *Myself.* They exist outside art, outside the painting culture, not as *art* but as a *challenge* to art. This is not what Rousseau meant but it is what Rousseau meant to the next generation. It took Picasso many years and some pretty drastic measures of breaking up and reassembling not just the grammar of painting but the grammar of the human face before he achieved through form-making a blatant, strident presence equivalent to these. Picasso's use of these paintings exemplifies precisely something Schiller said of naïve objects: "They accord us then the quite unique delight of being our example without putting us to shame."

At the time of the Galerie Charpentier's fiftieth anniversary Rousseau retrospective in 1961, Janet Flanner reported in *The New Yorker* on the state of Rousseau interpretation in Paris: "It is now supposed that the famous Montmartre banquet of honor given him by Picasso and Appollinaire at the Bateau-Lavoir was only an elaborate vinous farce. Since they so wonderfully built up his painting reputation as a joke, it is further deduced that once he was dead and they had the legend of his innocent genius laid at their door, like an exotic wreath, they had to revivify it out of shame and loyalty." Now it is certainly true that there is often some humbug in Rousseau cricitism, that it has a way of turning into Rousseau veneration. Appollinaire, for example, is usually cited as a Rousseau champion, but actually during Rousseau's lifetime he wrote some of the best-aimed barbs against him to appear in print. His famous eulogy, which appeared four years after Rousseau died, is written with only half an eye on the paintings and one and a half on the pathos of the old man who made them. Flanner's explanation seems unnecessarily ingenious though. Rousseau's art and his career in art cannot help but provoke a braided reaction, just as much in us now as it did in the young artists during Rousseau's lifetime; among the elements that compose that braid might well be cheerful mockery at its childishness, admiration for its simplicity, and regret for our own lost innocence.

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Louise Bogan's angry solitude

by Bruce Bawer

W. H. Auden called her one of the four "important" American poets of her time (the other three were T. S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, and Laura Riding); both Auden and Edmund Wilson called her the best American critic of poetry; and when Robert Frost read her first book of poems he said, "That woman will be able to do anything." But Louise Bogan—who was born in 1897, flourished during the Twenties and Thirties, and died in 1970, more or less ignored by the literary world in which she had lived for half a century—seems to have been destined to remain, in the eyes of the multitudes, a minor figure on the landscape of modern literature. That Bogan published so little work, relatively speaking, certainly didn't help. Between 1923 and 1937 she produced only three slim volumes of formal lyric poetry, *Body of This Death, Dark Summer,* and *The Sleeping Fury*; her three later books, issued at even longer intervals— *Poems and New Poems* (1941), *Collected Poems 1923-1953* (1954), and *The Blue Estuaries: Poems 1923-1968* (1968)—were all essentially "collected" volumes, recapitulations of Bogan's poetic *oeuvre,* containing a minimal amount of new verse. And her criticism, consisting mostly of brief reviews from *The New Yorker* (she served as the magazine's poetry critic from 1931 to 1969), did not appear in book form until the publication in 1955 of her *Selected Criticism: Poetry and Prose.*

A more significant reason for Bogan's comparative obscurity, perhaps, is that her work was never of a sensational sort. Her poetry appeared during the heydey of modernism, but it did not introduce amazing new forms or ideas, or capture the rhythm of American speech, or "embody the spirit of the age." Rather, her lyrics were, for the most part, precise, carefully nuanced contemplations of the folly of passion and other timeless themes. The poems were taut, crabbed, firmly controlled, suggestive of considerable private anguish yet utterly unsentimental and objective in tone. Bogan was clearly a disciple of the Pre-Raphaelites and the French Symbolists, as well as of Yeats and Frost, and this was, in general, all to the good in the Age of Eliot. But, just as clearly, Bogan was no camp-follower, no trend-watcher, no knee-jerk modernist out to "make it new" at all costs. Many of her poems had a spare, exotic particularity that was reminiscent of H. D. (a less accomplished poet), but, unlike H. D., Bogan had no Pound-like publicist behind her, no taste for self-mythologizing, no interest in founding a movement or introducing new ways of seeing and saying. She was, her poems suggest, a serious, solitary literary artist, bent on going her own way—a woman manifestly tortured by life, but determined to sublimate her anguish into the exquisite order of art.

That Bogan was, indeed, among the most serious and solitary—and most profoundly tormented—literary figures of her time is one of the chief lessons of Elizabeth Frank's

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absorbing new biography,[1] in which she evokes the compelling inner drama of a life that was, on the surface at least, desolate, depressing, and without apparent direction. Frank convincingly traces the emotional torment that is implicit in Bogan's poetry—in particular, the poet's obsession with the notion that tragedy is inherent in human passion—back to her childhood. And a harrowing childhood it was. The poet's father, Daniel Bogan, was a "feisty, cocky" Irish mill clerk, her mother Mary a tall, beautiful, high-spirited woman who had married somewhat beneath herself—or at least felt that she had. Throughout Louise's early years the family shuttled from one New England mill town to another, Mary browbeating Daniel every step of the way for no particular reason and engaging in brief extramarital affairs that she barely bothered to conceal. It was not a pleasant family for a sensitive young girl to grow up in, and school provided little relief. There Louise was taught her place: the nuns at Mount Saint Mary Academy in New Hampshire blatantly favored the rich girls, and the authorities at Girls' Latin School in Boston insisted that, however talented the already lyrically inclined Louise might be, "*no Irish girl* could be editor of the school magazine."

Even in these early years, poetry was an escape hatch for Louise, a "life-saving process"—but not in any sense that Erica Jong would understand. Poetry was an opportunity not to confess her anguish, in all its miserable particularity, but, on the contrary, to flee the prosaic confusion of the specific for the hard, fine clarity of the abstract, and to find comfort in the awareness that her emotions were timeless and universal. From the beginning Louise perceived poetry in a purely classical sense; the writing of verse was, accordingly, a serious vocation, a craft to be studied carefully and worked at assiduously. Bogan's first lyrics, composed at the age of fourteen, testify to the mature dedication with which she approached her chosen art. The poems are accomplished imitations of Swinburne, Morris, and the Rossettis, and demonstrate the precociousness with which Bogan learned how to handle alliteration and assonance and to achieve slow cadences. She was, as Frank points out, never to lose "the Pre-Raphaelite penchant for the filled-out line, in which every vowel, consonant, and syllable receives its complete, unhurried value . . . ." What she loved above all, in true Pre-Raphaelite fashion, were authors who cultivated a rich, intricate style, who cared about *sound.* Thus at seventeen she read and was mesmerized by the symphonic prose of Pater, and resolved thereupon to burn with a "hard, gem-like flame"; at the same age she pored through Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature,* discovered Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Mallarmé, and "adopted Symbolist aesthetics as [her] own." Thenceforth, as Frank notes, she "would always be engaged in transformations and correspondences, the two essential operations of the Symbolist mind."

Patently, poetry was a godsend to the teenaged Bogan, a bright spot in a rather gray life. Yet it did not, unfortunately, prevent her from developing into a highly insecure, unstable young woman. There were, Frank writes, "at least two Louises" during the poet's young adulthood: "one a tender, passionate, intensely sexual being, and the other a violent, cruel, and deeply suspicious fiend, who couldn't stand being loved . . . ." Throughout this period, Bogan was continually wracked by hostility, fear, and resentment toward nearly everyone around her; she lived (in her own words) in "a burned and angry solitude," and had to enter psychiatric hospitals for treatment after suffering nervous breakdowns in 1931 and 1933.

Literary success provided no relief from her anguish; if anything, it contributed to it. That success, as it happens, came to her relatively early. By the age of twenty-four, in fact—having spent a year at Boston College, married a young German named Curt Alexander (a lieutenant in the United States Army), given birth to a daughter named Maidie, been widowed after four years of

1 *Louise Bogan: A Portrait,* by Elizabeth Frank; Knopf, 460 pages, $24.95.

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marriage, and moved to New York—Bogan was already a member of the literary crowd, publishing poems in such estimable venues as *The New Republic* and *Vanity Fair* and hobnobbing with the likes of Edmund Wilson, Morton Dauwen Zabel, Rolfe Humphries, and Léonie Adams (all of whom were to become close friends). In 1923, to cap it all off, Bogan fell in love with a rich, handsome poet (lyric poet, of course) named Raymond Holden, and married him two years later. Her life was, at this juncture, everything she could have hoped for. But she was constitutionally incapable of enjoying it. She was "repelled" by the comfort that Holden's family money provided, and found life on the literary circuit to be "menacing and corrupting." Having grown up in an atmosphere of marital browbeating and betrayal, Bogan was pathologically suspicious of Holden and prone to hysterical fits of connubial violence—which he, to her confusion and irritation, insisted upon meeting with gentle words of love and reassurance. Holden was not the only target of Bogan's wrath. Apparently unable to forget that she had been despised as a schoolgirl for being poor, for being a "Mick," she directed a good portion of her hostility toward people whom she considered phony or supercilious. In particular, upper-class pretensions were anathema to her; she hated "'refined' manners, 'well-bred' accents, and 'nice' people; Ivy League attitudes; New York clubs." Though she had great affection for Wilson—a lifelong friend—his Princetonian pomposities infuriated her; and John Dos Passos struck her as nothing more than "a Harvard fake." That merit counted for so little in the world, and social position for so much, never ceased to torment Bogan.

Perhaps the apotheosis of fakery, in Bogan's book, was the literary world—which, to her mind, was little more than a setting for intellectual one-upmanship, reputation-brokerage, and logrolling. Though she deeply resented the failure of critics and public alike to give her poetry its due—as a rule, her books were respectfully but not prominently reviewed, and sold modestly—Bogan steadfastly refused to play the "literary game." Not till the mid-Thirties did she break her "public silence" and participate in a poetry reading. Such activities, to her way of thinking, were silly and self-aggrandizing, and had nothing at all to do with literature. She resented the indignity of having to "court" potential readers in such a manner. Couldn't her poetry speak for itself? It may be, of course, that she was simply unable to handle publicity, incapable of easily consolidating a public image with her private self. That, at least, appears to be the reason why she kept her daughter Maidie's existence a secret from her literary colleagues until her friend Margaret Mead happened to find out ("Louise," Mead berated her, "stop hiding your child!") and why, on the day she married Holden, she wrote a letter to Edmund Wilson without even mentioning the wedding.

It was during these confused, distressing years of her early adulthood that Bogan wrote the bulk of her mature lyrics. In these poems, the Pre-Raphaelite and Symbolist influences that characterized her juvenilia remained strong, but were tempered by the eloquent simplicity of Frost, the cold passion of Yeats, the precision of the Imagists, and the delicacy of her fellow priestesses of the lyric: Elinor Wylie, Sara Teasdale, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Léonie Adams. The poems are, as a result, unusually rich in texture—at once morbid and vibrant, dry and luxuriant, obsessed with the tension between the heart's attraction to the pagan sacrament of passion and the mind's craving for solitude and chastity. There are few people in them, only extreme emotions presented by name ("rage," "passion," "love," "sorrow") and—to serve as symbols—natural objects (stones, fields) and elements (earth, air, fire, water). The language is compressed, baroque, sometimes antiquated; words like "indurate," "cedarn," and "infatuate" (used as an adjective) occur frequently, and allusions to "blood," "memory," and "hell" are common. The indomitability of time is a

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major theme ("The measured blood beats out the year's delay . . ."). But the main point is that romantic passion is difficult, destructive, demented—and unavoidable. So precarious, indeed, does Bogan consider passion to be that its opposite, hatred, looks to her at times like a good thing; in a poem entitled "At a Party," she speaks of "enmity, that may save us all." To her mind, for a human soul to survive passion requires resolution and resilience beyond compare. In a poem called "Song" in *Body of This Death,* Bogan writes:

> Be strong, to look on my heart
> As others look on my face.
> Love me,—I tell you that it is a ravaged,
> Terrible place.

If one had a choice, she suggests in "Second Song" (from *Dark Summer*), one would renounce passion entirely:

> I said out of sleeping:
> Passion, farewell.
> Take from my keeping
> Bauble and shell,
>
> Black salt, black provender.
> Tender your store
> To a new pensioner,
> To me no more.

But, as "The Alchemist" implies, passion cannot be renounced, any more than life can be denied:

> I burned my life, that I might find
> A passion wholly of the mind,
> Thought divorced from eye and bone,
> Ecstasy come to breath alone.
> I broke my life, to seek relief
> From the flawed light of love and grief.
>
> With mounting beat the utter fire
> Charred existence and desire.
> It died low, ceased its sudden thresh.
> I had found unmysterious flesh—
> Not the mind's avid substance—still
> Passionate beyond the will.

Many a Bogan lyric is, in a sense, a dialogue of self and soul—a rehearsal of the conflict between mind and heart. To Bogan, the heart and the mind are always at odds, for the passion to which the heart is drawn is categorically unwise. The love of women "is an eager meaninglessness/Too tense, or too lax." "What a marvel to be wise," she writes, "To love never in this manner!" One of Bogan's longer poems, "Exhortation" (from *The Sleeping Fury*), urges us to ignore the heart, and heed the counsel of the mind:

> Give over seeking bastard joy
> Nor cast for fortune's side-long look.
> Indifference can be your toy;
> The bitter heart can be your book.
> (Its lesson torment never shook.)
>
> In the cold heart, as on a page,
> Spell out the gentle syllable
> That puts short limit to your rage
> And curdles the straight fire of hell,
> Compassing all, so all is well.
>
> Read how, though passion sets in storm
> And grief's a comfort, and the young
> Touch at the flint when it is warm,
> It is the dead we live among,
> The dead given motion, and a tongue.
>
> The dead, long trained to cruel sport
> And the crude gossip of the grave;
> The dead, who pass in motley sort,
> Whom sun nor sufferance can save.
> Face them. They sneer. Do not be brave.
>
> Know once for all; their snare is set
> Even now; be sure their trap is laid;
> And you will see your lifetime yet
> Come to their terms, your plans unmade,—
> And be belied, and be betrayed.

Yet the heart, to its bitter misfortune, will not be overruled by the mind:

> The woman who has grown old
> And know desire must die,
> Yet turns to love again,
> Hears the crows cry.

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For all its torturousness, though, life is wonderful and holy and worth struggling for: that this is her attitude is implicit in the very force and fervency of Bogan's lyrics. Elizabeth Frank is right when she locates Bogan "on the side of life" and describes her poetry as based upon a "passionate belief in the sacredness of life" and in "the tenderness and strength of the human heart."

Bogan's criticism is based on the same beliefs. She began contributing reviews to magazines in 1924, when Wilson, insistent that she train herself to write criticism—something she felt certain she was incapable of—"ordered her to sit down at her desk and begin." So well did she take instruction from Wilson that book reviews eventually became her livelihood. But, though Wilson taught her a great deal, she was no meek disciple of her formidable friend. Bogan the literary critic was, in fact, as independent a spirit as Bogan the poet, utterly uninterested, it would seem, in truckling to the trends of the day. One of these trends was New Criticism, a form of literary inquiry for which Bogan had little use. John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate and company were, to her mind, "abstract, overingenious, and deliberately obscure mandarins, out to safeguard their academic and social prestige by demonstrating the need for a priestly class of explicators and interpreters." She resented their "assumption of intellectual superiority" to the writers they analyzed, and in reviewing Ransom's *The New Criticism* in 1941, accused him of intellectual snobbery: "To think, and to express oneself in images," she wrote, "is becoming rather vulgar." When Ransom, in his response to the review, advised Bogan that there were many different and valid vocabularies in which to write literary criticism, she had an answer for him: "If one is to be a true critic of literature," she suggested, "beneath any vocabulary must exist a state of sensibility, an intuitive grasp, an open mind, and a generous and humble heart." Bogan didn't like the New Critics' poetry any better than she did their criticism. She described the verse in Tate's *Poems: 1928-1931* as "fakery," dominated by ideas and "completely lacking in intuitive flow." To Bogan, true poetry was built not upon ideas but upon images; mastering poetry, she felt, had less to do with being extremely intelligent than with being highly sensitive—sensitive not only to one's own feelings but to the exquisite and subtle nuances of human behavior and perception. It is perhaps better for the purposes of poetry-writing, she once said, "to be an ignorant one with insight than a wise, obtuse-to-delicate-veins-of-value one."

The most prominent critical trend of the 1930s, needless to say, was Marxist criticism. Several friends of Bogan's were adherents—Rolfe Humphries, for one, and of course Edmund Wilson. Given the pressure that Bogan endured to take a Marxist line in her own reviews, it is little short of remarkable that she managed to resist at all. But resist she did—entirely. That she did so is a tribute equally to her strength of character, the depth and seriousness of her love for literature, and her common sense. Marxism, apparently, held no attraction for her whatsoever. On the contrary, she was, as Elizabeth Frank writes, "contemptuous of any form of 'Social Realism' in either art or literature, and thought those who believed that the world had been born anew in the Soviet Union were fools." And they were not harmless fools, either; they were, she felt, mindlessly endangering the humane Western culture that she treasured. Frank seems hardly to be exaggerating when she says that Bogan "f[ought] her way through the Thirties." "As the decade advanced," Frank says, "Bogan began to feel isolated in her love of what she called 'beautiful letters,'" standing nearly alone, it seems, against the hordes of "proletarian poets" who were, it seemed to her, out to rob poetry of everything that made it valuable, and against the leftist critics who excoriated Bogan, with her solid aesthetic criteria, as a vestige of the "obsolete twenties." (Bogan was, in the words of *The New Republic*'s Eda Lou Walton, "a dead leaf on a dead branch.") "I STILL THINK," she wrote Humphries in

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a letter, the upper-case letters indicating her desperation, "THAT POETRY HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE IMAGINATION: I STILL THINK IT OUGHT TO BE WELL-WRITTEN. I STILL THINK IT IS PRIVATE FEELING, NOT PUBLIC SPEECH."

What has happened is predictable enough. While the literary essays and reviews produced by most of Bogan's politically *au courant* contemporaries are, today, utterly worthless except as historical relics—cautionary reminders of the folly of political fanaticism—Bogan's literary criticism is timeless. Her reviews are solid and sensible, her standards consistent and beyond reproach. Though, admittedly, the reviews are woefully short on close analysis (these were, after all, brief notices for *The New Yorker*) and a little long on adjectives like "superb" and "delightful," they invariably provide thoughtful general descriptions of the works under consideration, and tally the strengths and weaknesses of those works with care, accuracy, and fairness. Bogan's style is smooth and elegant, her tone neutral to sardonic; she is so determined not to draw attention to herself that at times her prose is flatter and duller than it has to be. Once in a while, though, she gets off a memorable line. She describes *Three Guineas,* for instance, as an "exposé of upper-class Englishman's tyranny over upper-class Englishwoman," and at the end of her review acknowledges that, "Patently, being a lady is difficult, but artists have managed to make something of even worse situations and inheritances." (That she was thinking of herself here cannot be doubted.) Of Marianne Moore (one of her favorite modern poets), Bogan writes: "She relates the refreshing oddities of art to the shocking oddities of life." Reviewing Archibald MacLeish, on the other hand (who, to Bogan's mind, was more interested in "waken[ing] the population to 'Fascist' dangers" than in creating literature), Bogan finds even the title un-aesthetic: "*America Was Promises* is a sentence which even an untrained ear instinctively rejects; it sounds ugly. But it also sounds impressive, and 'public speech' is out to impress." And in a sensitive passage about Pound's *Cantos LII-LXXL* Bogan seems to speak not as critic to reader but as poet to poet:

> . . . if Pound plans to make "plunges into Paradise," he must be able to put aside his hatred, as Dante managed to do. If one hates anything too long, one not only begins to resemble what is hated but one forgets, one becomes incapable even of imagining any longer, what it is that one could love. What Pound would do in a paradise unencumbered by old bills of lading and growls about usury, it is becoming difficult to think. Moral indignation is one thing; *l'amor,* which Dante said moved the sun and other stars, is something even more difficult.

The second half of Bogan's life was more solitary, more serene, and far less poetically productive than the first. After divorcing Holden in 1934, she never remarried, and had only a couple of affairs (one of them with the poet Theodore Roethke). Her capacity for both rage and love diminished following the treatment of her two nervous breakdowns in the early Thirties. Elizabeth Frank says that, though "[s]he who had always felt everything felt little now, or controlled her feelings beyond reasonableness," Bogan was, nonetheless, "in every way a richer, more substantial person than she had been before her illness." While Bogan considered this newfound stability to be a personal blessing, it was also a professional curse: she recognized that the rage, bitterness and passion that had torn her apart in earlier times had kept her distanced, in a way, from the world, and had made possible an intense yet strangely impersonal poetry. Now that she was, in Frank's words, "no longer neurotically at a remove from life," the poems did not come to her so readily as they had before. Indeed, she could write poetry, she learned, "only when in a rage (of anger or of hatred), or in a state which I can only describe as malicious pity. And the emotion that writes tender and delicate poetry is so much akin to the emotion of love

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that it *is* love, to all intents and purposes." So mentally well balanced was Bogan that, for seven years during the 1940s, she did not compose a single poem.

Instead, she wrote prose—stories, "prose *capriccios*," journal entries. And, of course, reviews, though she grew more and more removed from the literary scene and increasingly disgusted with the crude confessional voices that shouted at her throughout the Fifties and Sixties. She broke her "public silence" to an impressive extent, becoming a visiting instructor of poetry-writing at various universities. She spent time with new friends like May Sarton; translated Goethe, Jünger, and Renard with Elizabeth Meyer and Elizabeth Roget; and, in her capacity as William Maxwell's unofficial editor and advisor, played a significant role in the shaping of his magnificent novel *The Folded Leaf*. But mostly she was alone with her thoughts and memories and occasional bursts of lyricism. What poems she did manage to complete during these lonely latter years were unmistakable products of the Bogan sensibility, but the style was often freer, the tone more relaxed, than in her earlier works. New influences found their way into her lines. Auden, as he developed from a young poet into an elderly master, became a favorite of Bogan's, and his witty conversational tone rubbed off on her. Rilke, whose poetry she discovered in 1935, became nothing less than an idol; what she treasured about his work was that "[h]e *looked* at things. He looked and looked and looked, and the poems are absolute and true . . . . My merciful God. I'm going to spend the rest of my life humbly looking."

In her enthusiasm, it must be said, Elizabeth Frank does overestimate Louise Bogan's contribution to literature, placing her alongside such great lyric poets as George Herbert and Gerard Manley Hopkins. But this is an enthusiasm that no one who loves poetry and takes its creation seriously can have trouble understanding. For—though she was, admittedly, a minor poet—Bogan was a poet's poet. She deserves to be remembered, with the greatest possible respect, not only for her highly accomplished poetry and criticism but for the consistent seriousness of purpose with which she approached her art. She was, as Frank's impressive book makes clear, the personification of literary commitment; in her biographer's words, she "revered art and lived for it as purely as Flaubert." In these peculiar days—when many a celebrated poet is distinguished only by his solipsism, and many a respected critic notable primarily for his ability to confuse—Louise Bogan is, more than ever, a literary figure whose memory is worth cherishing.

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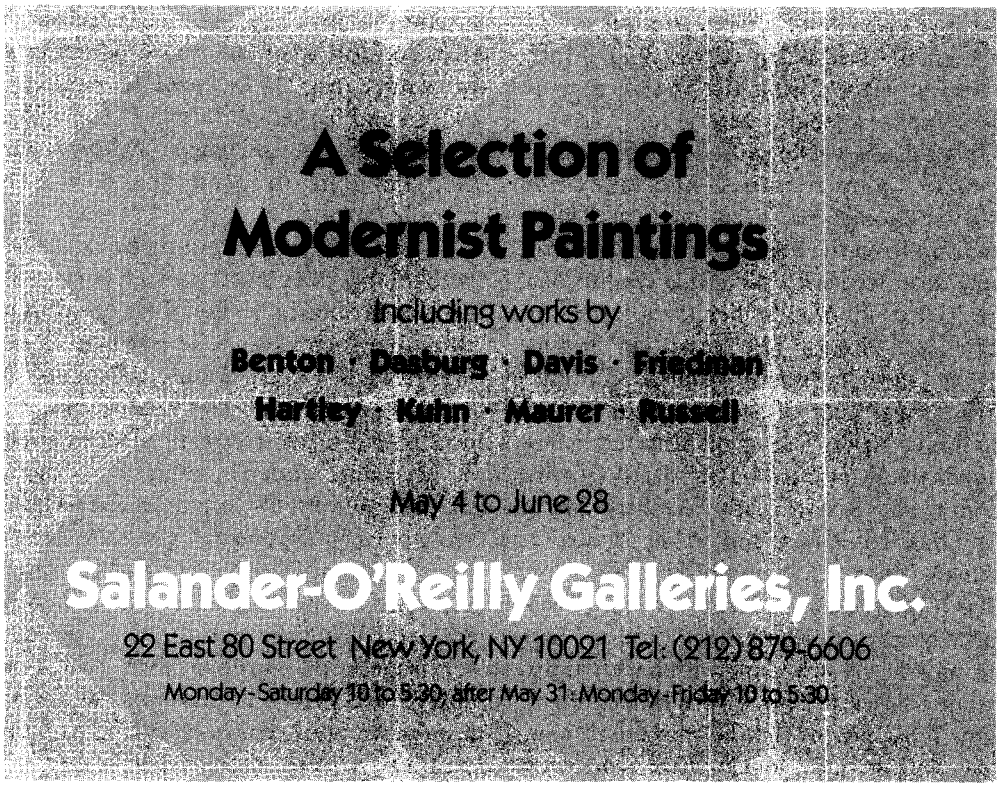
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Poems *by Brad Leithauser, Jane Kenyon, Peter Davison, & W. S. Di Piero*

A noisy sleeper

I. 1958

The noisy sleeper
in the other room is my
Grandfather whose snores go up & down
up & down like a zipper. Deeper

deeper for the dark
his big breathing climbs
and slips away
like the moon like the day

like Cinny who I so
much wanted to stay
here with me in a bed too big
for me. But Cinny when I let her go

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was gone
on her clicking toes
in blackness with the thin slits
open on her black nose

and not a shiver in her chest
for what out there just might
be waiting. She lies at ease I know
on a floor in the night

body curled completely
in the safety of a ring
in whose fur center her head
fits neatly.

In his desk for luck he keeps
an Indian head
penny with the date
he was born which is 1898.

He promised he will look
for one for luck for me
which is 1953.
Whatever

could be that's wrong
what is needed I know
is to be watchful to be strong
simply

though such breathing's far
too big for this house in which
he & I together are
sleeping and I do not sleep.

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II. 1983

Recalling now
From the subsiding brink
Of earliest memory
The night-sounds of that man,
My grandfather, is to see
How even at age five one can
Accept reassurances as though
They were believable while
Darkly continuing to think
Things over—to see how
Soon the mind learns to reconcile
Itself to a complex ignorance,
As one begins to know

One does not know.
Now whatever that unnamed
Crisis actually was that placed me
In that giant's bed that night
(Illness in the family?
Some remote, unheard-of fight?
Or, likelier, a disaster lifted
From the blaze of a small boy's inflamed
Imagination . . .) it passed
Much as night passes into dawn,
Unobserved and at last,
Leaving no trace as it drifted
Wholly out of mind. Gone—

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Like the existence
Of all others in that house. No doubt
My grandmother was there, too,
Sleeping or, like me, pretending
To sleep, but I don't recall
Her presence, or anyone who
Played with me that day, or what fell out
The next. No, in memory
It's simply two people all
Alone, my grandfather and me,
Bound across the distance
Of a night that rises
And falls and has no ending.

And yet for all
Memory's shortcomings, one still must
Marvel at its power to restore
The feel of that small boy's fears,
Or the way it can take an old man
Dead now some twenty years
And hold him up close enough
To overhear the rise and fall
Of his slow breathing, just
As though his were once more
The sort of sleep from which—broken
By ruminative snorts, gruff
Assentive gasps—he could be woken.

—Brad Leithauser

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After travelling

While I rake in silence
my plot of grass under the great trees—
the oaks and monumental maples—
I think of the proprietor

of the Cafe dei Fiori, sleepy, preoccupied,
dressed to the nines,
setting out tables in the Via Frattina—
extending his empire each day
by the smallest of increments
until there is room for another place . . .

at which we happen to be sitting
on the day the city official comes,
also dressed to the nines, to unwind
his shining metal measure in the street:
two tables must go. But for now
the proprietor shrugs, and a look
of infinite weariness passes
over his face. This is Rome:
remorse would be out of place . . . .

And the white-coated waiters
arrange on doilied silver trays
the tiers of sugared pastries: angel wings,
cat-tongues, and little kiwi tarts;
and the coffee machines fizzle and spurt
such appetizing steam; and a woman
in a long red cape goes by
leading a matched pair of pugs
on a bifurcated leash.

—*Jane Kenyon*

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The face in the field

The meadow yielded thirteen bales an acre.
"Was that a record?" I asked one of the experts.
"It must have been a record. When was the last time
you manured that meadow? Eighteen-eighty-one?"
Yet it is beautiful, whether mowed or not.
After its saddest mowing, stubble bristled
sparsely, yet the stalks stood up like Christians.
Now, when the second crop is coming in,
it bends to the wind as if a hand had stroked it.
Here there's a patch of purple-colored fescue
that glistens metallic at the heart of summer;
there, dogbane creeps in on the heels of the mowing
to hold its tiny white blossoms as a girl does,
stooping to drink, clutching beads to her breast
to keep them from getting wet in the fountain.
High to the south, where maps mark "the great ledge,"
is where my father's ashes tumbled down,
and, ten years after them, his widow's followed.
Low to the north, closer to the ground,
another outcrop from the field, a ledge
of pink-and-green-flecked granite, with a pinch
of silver sprinkled over its harsh surface,
speaks the word JANE for her who has become
familiar of the place but once was its mistress.
How difficult to keep her face in mind
as part of a living body! The body lives on,
sometimes remembered in my arms and fingers,
but the face that spoke to me with eyes and throat
resists replacement. Yet it will live on,
a vagueness in the grass, a ghost among trees.

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I have stared out a thousand times across
the field, hoping to see what she
rested her eyes upon while she was dying,
but I can see nothing there beyond the leaves.
They were happy enough to speak to me before,
whatever it is that leaves and trees will speak of,
but how can they now so wholly have repossessed
the country that she took the time to die in?
Perhaps it's just as well. Remembered things
should not survive by long the death of the body.
See? Every year the grass renews itself
with shoots and leaves and, ultimately, flowers.

—*Peter Davison*

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The divine

The night sea's broken forms,
its long torn hush,
erase every recent trace
like wind to dust.

In the scrublight, another's
sharp footprints mix
with black sand, the tide's scrawl
over weeds and sticks.

My voice going out has nothing
new to say, no slight
shock of self to lend
a world hammered soft tonight.

Teach me not to love
the flattery of foam
and salt. Teach me, soon, to learn
I have nothing of my own.

—*W. S. Di Piero*

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Music

Jarrett joins the Bach parade

by Samuel Lipman

Lo, poor Bach! Lo, for that matter, poor Domenico Scarlatti and poor Handel. For their ill luck in being born in the same year of 1685, they are being celebrated together in the present year, three not so glorious centuries later. This celebration will doubtless be perceived by the lovers of classical music as the tribute vice pays to virtue. The real danger of course is that the tribute will end up being the one virtue pays to vice.

An example of the dangers inherent in the possibility of winning converts from what might be called other musics was provided by the recital in the middle of March at New York's Avery Fisher Hall of the eminent, or at least eminently successful, jazz pianist Keith Jarrett. According to the biography contained in the concert program, Mr. Jarrett has recently forsaken the worldwide performance of the "spontaneously composed and improvised solo-piano concerts" which have occupied him for a decade. The recordings of these concerts, along with studio tapings, have sold "over five million copies worldwide." One live concert recording, from a performance in Cologne, has sold "over one million copies, making it the most popular piano recording ever released."

Having given up this artistic goldmine, Mr. Jarrett is now devoting himself to playing a demanding portion of the traditional keyboard repertory. Since 1982 he has performed the Second and Third Concertos of Bartok, the immensely difficult Concerto of Samuel Barber, two solo concertos of Mozart, and a Mozart two-piano concerto —with the collaboration of another jazz star, Chick Corea. Mr. Jarrett has performed these important works with some of today's best-known ensembles, including the Philadelphia Orchestra, the San Francisco Symphony, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, and the English Chamber Orchestra.

As part of his desire to "explore more fully the classical repertoire," Mr. Jarrett chose the Great Performers series at Lincoln Center to pay tribute to the three towering musical geniuses of the class of 1685. Bach, Scarlatti, and Handel are in no way unknown quantities in today's concert world. More than a century of "traditional" performances of their music is now giving way to "authentic" performances which replace modern instruments with original ones, or their reproductions. The different sounds coming from these earlier instruments have impressed many sophisticates as providing a fresh look at a music they had come to treat as routine. Mr. Jarrett's playing of this music, coming as it does from an aesthetic world putatively foreign to that of early European art music, must have seemed yet another chance to hear old music in a new way. And at the same time, Mr. Jarrett's legion of fans cannot but appear to the backers of classical music as new recruits for a flagging cause.

Mr. Jarrett's fans did indeed show up at Fisher Hall, along with some more conventional musical types who were there, pre-

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sumably, to test the water. It was hard to tell what the pianist's fans thought. These predominantly well-groomed and well-dressed young people seemed on their best behavior. Only their tendency to whistle and laugh approvingly at Mr. Jarrett's stage behavior betrayed their discontinuity with the usual staid concert audience. One sophisticated music lover of my acquaintance—a critic, as a matter of fact—summed up the reaction of his own kind at intermission: "I thought Jarret'd be off the wall in this music," he complained. "But he's really so *conservative.*"

It must be said that the stage setting was anything but typical of a solo piano recital. Though the piano lid was fully raised (as is usual in solo playing), the music desk too was up, plainly signifying that the pianist would use music rather than play by memory. That the printed score was to be something more than an occasional aid was demonstrated by the provision of a page turner's chair to the left of the pianist's concert stool. Mr. Jarrett's first appearance onstage (followed by his page turner) was hardly conventional either. Dressed in a sloppy grey shirt and baggy black pants, he shambled out in a manner both tentative and cocky; it was as if he didn't know quite what he was doing there, but whatever he was doing, he was the best. There were some latecomers in the sold-out hall, and their coming down the aisle after Mr. Jarrett had seated himself at the piano seemed to discomfit him. Finally he shambled backstage, and then immediately returned to the slightly nervous amusement of the audience.

From the first notes of the first work on the program, the Handel Suite No. 15 in D minor, it was abundantly clear why my critic friend's intermission judgment would be dead on. The sound coming from the piano, accompanied by soulful body movements and vocal murmurings, was round, fat, and thoroughly romantic. But it was monotonous, and quickly began to seem poorly focused, possibly because of some deficiency in Mr. Jarrett's technical training. Such rapid passage work as there was in this relatively simple Handel music was played with the kind of rhythmic unsteadiness which often marks amateur pianism and separates it from its professional counterpart. Though the frequent short trills and other ornaments the pianist employed were of an up-to-date scholarly character, the total effect was spoiled by his unfortunate tendency to delay the accompaniment to these ornaments in order to allow his fingers enough time to fit in all the notes. The total effect was far from the kind of motoric energy aimed at in the performances of Christopher Hogwood and the Academy of Ancient Music, today's exemplars of authentic baroque performance practice.

Another Handel suite, this one No. 13 in B-flat, followed. Again Mr. Jarrett seemed to have trouble ending his trills clearly, and his left hand often seemed clumsy and even slightly irregular. Next came two short Scarlatti sonatas, identified in the program by their keys—F minor and F major—rather than by the widely used (and more specific) Longo numbers or by the more recent chronologies of Ralph Kirkpatrick and Giorgio Pestelli. Perhaps in formulating his interpretive strategy, Mr. Jarrett put too much weight on the composers' birth years, for under his fingers Handel and Scarlatti sounded very much the same. Completely absent was the rhythmic vitality with which Scarlatti must be played to avoid a false impression of tedium and wallpaper-like repetition. In its place was a kind of expressive mooning which, after generations of vapid playing, has come to be associated with weak-kneed performances of Chopin. Mr. Jarrett distorted Scarlatti's beautiful melodies and touching harmonic progressions by applying unvaried agogic accents—created by pausing before the arrival at important melodic notes and harmonies—and by suppressing normal dynamic stresses at climactic points. More than any of Mr. Jarrett's specific technical weaknesses, this backward approach helped to color his performances of this exciting music just about the same grey as his shirt.

The pianist's attentions now turned to the immortal Bach. First came the great French

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Suite No. 3 in B minor, BWV 814. Once again there was no stylistic differentiation between composers; again, everything sounded the same. There was no progress, no momentum, no feeling of departure and certainly none of arrival. Fast movement, slow movement, it didn't matter: all one could hear was a kind of pleasant, low-key, goodwilled music-making. Though the concert was less than thirty minutes old, it already was painfully clear that Mr. Jarrett had only one way of playing a melodic line: start loud and get soft. Everywhere—and this included his performance of the Prelude and Fugue No. 11 in F major from the second book of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* that followed—he showed a failed sense of rhythm, pulse, and bar structure.

After the intermission, Mr. Jarrett performed the *Italian Concerto,* perhaps Bach's most frequently played (and certainly most frequently studied) work for solo keyboard. In essaying this masterpiece, Mr. Jarrett was not just putting himself in competition with the "great performers" of the past, among them harpsichordist Wanda Landowska and pianists Edwin Fischer and Artur Schnabel, who have recorded the work. He was also placing himself among the throngs of players of baroque keyboard music now appearing before the public.

Unfortunately, Mr. Jarrett missed the mark in every way. His tempo for the opening movement, though blindingly fast, produced no feeling of excitement and tension, but instead only a sludge-like texture achieved by an almost invariable *forte* and an insufficient differentiation of touch and finger articulation. At the beginning of the sublime slow middle movement, Mr. Jarrett ignored Bach's plain notation, which requires the player's left hand to convey to the listener the existence of two separate voices. When the soprano melody entered, Mr. Jarrett resumed his old habit of starting loud and then backing away from every climax. Bach's noble cantilena ended up sounding like some kind of wayward *salon* kitsch. For those of Mr. Jarrett's listeners who knew the *Italian Concerto* in particular and the music of Bach in general, the result must have seemed peculiar and empty. For those coming to this great art for the first time, the insipidity of the performance did nothing to reveal the strength of the music. Nor were matters better in the work's last movement: a *fortissimo* beginning, an ignoring of Bach's directions for dynamic contrast, and a muddling of the distinctions between separate polyphonic strands—all of this served up a stew rather than presenting a precise and leanly conceived work of art.

The musical value of Mr. Jarrett's performances of Handel, Scarlatti, and Bach was, I think, just about nil. This music is vastly better performed by players known and unknown, young and old, live or on records. To hear Bach, one needn't go to Keith Jarrett.

But, it will no doubt be said, Mr. Jarrett was performing a valuable missionary function. Some will see him as a kind of Stokowski of our time, a propagandist for great music who puts not just his artistic talents but the very success of his performing career at the service of a music his audience will only be able to appreciate when it is presented through the medium of his charismatic personality. On this reading Mr. Jarrett's very shortcomings to "traditional" music lovers are artistic strengths making him fit for his holy mission. Preaching to the musical heathen, so the argument will go, is after all a very different matter from satisfying the needs of the already sophisticated.

Leaving the comparison with Stokowski aside—that complicated personality, whatever his sweet tooth for a mass success, did have his origins in the world of classical music—the problem of Keith Jarrett for the supporters of high musical art becomes one of trade-offs. Is what Mr. Jarrett is selling close enough to the real thing to justify his shortcomings in performance? Is the musical premise upon which his audience is being beguiled close enough to what animates the music of Bach (or Scarlatti or Handel) to make classical music lovers out of the aficionados of jazz and other, more popular, musics?

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There is no clear answer to these questions. On the Damascus road one does not choose one's epiphanies; it is possible to approach the goal of artistic insight in many ways. In fact what Mr. Jarrett does may well be close enough to instill in his listeners a hunger for real musical nourishment. Some of his listeners will doubtless like the music he is playing rather than the way he plays it; these souls will be ready to move on to something artistically better.

But to put matters in this way is to take refuge in a kind of relativism and self-doubt. There can be little question that Mr. Jarrett's audience is better served by his playing Bach, Scarlatti, and Handel than the kind of pap and worse which is so regularly served up by the superstars of commercial music. The real danger is that Mr. Jarrett's popular success, with all that it promises to artists and audience alike of money and glory, will become something to be emulated. Instead of his success being the means and high art being the goal, the order will be reversed. The result would mean the destruction of the very idea of an unsullied art, a world beyond—at least in our aspirations—the necessary contingencies of worldly prosperity. The worry which ought to be bothering the devotees of Bach, Handel, and Scarlatti as they contemplate Keith Jarrett's movement to their side ought not to be that his own audience will like what he does; it ought to be that they themselves, in their desire to become part of a cultural mainstream, will approve Mr. Jarrett's failed art merely because he is so successful doing it. Were this to happen, the current birthday celebrations of the wise men of 1685, rather than being sweet, would be sour indeed.

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Art

Thinking about the Seventies

by Eric Gibson

What are we to make of the art of the Seventies? Are we in a position to write its history? Some people obviously think so. For we have now been given two enterprises which take the art of the Seventies as their subject: Corrine Robbins's book, *The Pluralist Era: American Art, 1968-1981,*[1] and the exhibition, "A New Beginning: 1968-1978," organized by Mary Delahoyd, professor of art history at Sarah Lawrence College, at The Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, New York.[2]

Once it was thought that fifty years was the minimum amount of time that was needed for viewing "recent" art with the necessary detachment. That was the rule in effect at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, for example, until very recent times. Yet even though this rule and what it implies have long since passed out of favor, the general approach to the recent past tends even today to be highly selective rather than comprehensive, concentrating on individual artists or groups rather than attempting to encompass an entire historical period.

What is remarkable about these two recent efforts at instant history is that they attempt to go beyond the usual decade-end hodgepodge survey mounted by museums and ask to be taken as full-dress scholarly studies of a period scarcely five years in the past. Are we to believe that there is something particularly fascinating, even haunting, about the art of the Seventies for those who were closely involved with it at the time—as artists, critics, and historians? Or is there, in their eyes, something that needs understanding and explaining before we can proceed with the Eighties?

Of the two enterprises, Corrine Robbins's book is the more modest in ambition—which is both its strength and its weakness. Robbins writes in her introduction that *The Pluralist Era* is an attempt to "describe some of the main movements and most important artists of the period in question." And she does indeed discuss many prominent artists—for example, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, Chuck Close, Brice Marden, William Wegman, Sol LeWitt, Robert Irwin. But she devotes a good deal of space as well to artists whose work is anything but important.

A period as fractious as the Seventies needs careful handling, and it is likely that a more heavy-handed approach than Miss Robbins's would have excluded some important figures. Yet she errs the other way. By failing to differentiate between important and marginal works of art, she fails to provide a clear picture of the period under

1 *The Pluralist Era: American Art, 1968-1981,* by Corinne Robbins, Harper & Row, 1984, 246 pages, illustrated, $25.95.

2 "A New Beginning: 1968-1978" opened February 3 and will run until May 5. The exhibition's catalogue, *A New Beginning: 1968-1978,* was published by The Hudson River Museum: 128 pages, paperback, $10.

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review. In chapter after chapter ("Process and Conceptual Art," "Art and Politics," "Site Works and Installations," etc.) we are given a straightforward sequence of names, dates, events, and places—and little more. This gives *The Pluralist Era* a decidedly descriptive, diary-like cast and prevents it from being the work of history or criticism one naturally expects it to be. Repeatedly we come to the end of a passage on an artist anticipating some sort of summary sentence that will put what has been said into perspective, and all we get is an inadequate and brief characterization. Miss Robbins appears to be unduly nervous about burdening her journalistic account with anything so controversial as an opinion.

For example, her principal observation concerning Frank Stella—discussed in the chapter on abstraction—is that "in the Seventies . . . he insisted on remaining a developing artist and refused to arrive and remain at a fixed painting style." There follows a listing of the iconographic mutations of Stella's work, interspersed with the observations of other critics. Along the way, Robbins offers some interesting ideas about the role of Cubist space in Stella's recent works. But she doesn't pursue the matter, nor is it very clearly articulated. (One sentence reads: "To use and refer to Cubist space while simultaneously dispensing with the canvas edge, which was its governing factor, would seem to justify the notion of making planar works that set up new, canvas-like relationships with the wall.") Her discussion of Stella concludes with this curious observation: "In his *Swan* engravings, Stella traced his lineage back to the early Cubist masters and made us see how far, by the Eighties, we have traveled and how circuitous the route of abstract art can be." Perhaps. But where in all this is there any sense of the way in which Stella's work of the Seventies relates to his work of the Sixties? What is the significance, in the current climate of postmodernism, of this perpetuation of orthodox modernist concerns? And finally, just how good is the art that has grown out of these preoccupations? Such questions go entirely unanswered in Robbins's book.

In the absence of any clearly defined artistic hierarchy, it is hard to know exactly whom we should consider to be the most important figures of the last decade. From *The Pluralist Era* we might conclude that during the Seventies everyone was equally successful, equally important, equally good—that Stuart Diamond was on a par with Frank Stella, Deborah Remington with Elizabeth Murray, Nicholas Africano with Susan Rothenberg. It is true that we are very close to the period in question, and time's inevitable winnowing process is of little help to us. But that is all the more reason for a chronicler of the Seventies to attempt to do what historians and critics usually do: order a body of material to reflect a coherent point of view.

This, in effect, is what Mary Delahoyd has attempted to do in the exhibition, "A New Beginning: 1968-1978." To what degree she has succeeded is another question. In her view the decade's essential characteristic was the impulse toward "subjective, personal inquiry," which constitutes the "new beginning" of the show's title. This impulse, as she sees it, has produced three distinct types of art: first, works which "move beyond object to situation . . . which depend on an interior or natural context for their physical support . . . and which may even have a limited temporal existence"; second, works which "invent self-determined systems [and] give private twists to the grid or alphabet or the verbal or visual imagery which they can generate"; and third, works which "leave the comprehensiveness of systems and claim instead the realm of personal narration."

Now, of the many ways of characterizing the art of the Seventies, an excessive concentration on the grid or the alphabet can scarcely claim a special priority. It is true that Jennifer Bartlett, whose work is included in the show, uses the grid, but few other artists do—at least to judge by the content of their work. But it is not always clear how Delahoyd's categories apply to

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certain artists. Joel Shapiro, for instance, is included in the "personal narration" category, suggesting that this is what his work is primarily about. But is it really? What about Shapiro's *formal* contributions to the art of sculpture, or his part in the movement to reintroduce recognizable imagery?

More important, Delahoyd's categories lead her to make some dubious choices. Marjorie Strider is represented in the show by *1973,* a yellow fiberglass floor sculpture in which the digits 1, 9, 7, and 3 are joined by a blue ooze which seems to have knocked some of them over. This work may conceivably fit into the category of "private twists on grid or alphabet" (numbers are said to constitute a "mental grid"), but are we really to believe that *1973* is, or ever will be, a work that can be taken to be representative of the best art of the Seventies? Another dubious choice is Sam Cady's *Tent Billowing in the Wind* (1976). Miss Delahoyd writes that the painting "provokes recollections of vacation, childhood, a cool forest, a sweet-smelling breeze." As it happens, I think the "subject" of this painting is less bucolic reverie than a rather obvious pictorial pun. The canvas is shaped to conform to a two-dimensional silhouette, right down to having literal space between "tent" and "tent pole." Thus, it could be argued that, by demolishing the sense of the canvas as flat support, *Tent Billowing in the Wind* is a parody of formalist aesthetics, that pillar of modernist theory which stressed pigment, flatness, and shape in the service of *abstract* art. But even if the painting stands as a commentary on formalism, it certainly does not stand as one of the important works of the Seventies.

One could overlook these curatorial decisions were they sufficiently balanced by others of more compelling artistic interest. But they are not. Major figures of the decade are missing from the show—among them, Chuck Close, Malcolm Morley, and Frank Stella (although Stella is cited by Miss Delahoyd as one of the catalysts of the "new beginning" she is documenting). Moreover, while in a show of this kind one expects to see work of the first caliber from which artists have been chosen to represent the period, we come away from "A New Beginning: 1968-1978" with the impression that Miss Delahoyd pretty much had to settle for what she could get in the way of loans. This casts a pall over the entire exhibition.

Mary Delahoyd's outlook on the Seventies suffers, moreover, from the same problem of perspective that afflicts Corinne Robbins's book. Both approach their subject as if the world began and ended on the dates they have selected, as if there were no overlapping of generations or of artistic and historical impulses. In both cases they offer almost no historical preamble, nor do they indicate what has happened to these various artistic developments in the 1980s.

My own feeling is that it is too early for us to properly assess the art of the Seventies in such comprehensive historical terms. But apparently we now feel that we have to try. (Is this compulsion something we have inherited from the art world of the Seventies?) Museums and publishing houses nowadays seem to feel an immense pressure to be first with a comprehensive interpretation of very recent art. Just as the commercial art world can hardly wait, from one season to another, to come up with a new artist-hero, so the art historians are eager to demonstrate that they can take a proper measure of even the most pluralistic contemporary scene.

How, then, can we best approach the art of the Seventies? I think we must first of all avoid the thematic categories that Robbins and Delahoyd insist upon and concentrate instead on grouping artists in another way. I can imagine, for example, a show made up of three categories: artists who first achieved recognition during the Seventies and who helped to shape it artistically (Susan Rothenberg, Jennifer Bartlett, Elizabeth Murray, Laurie Anderson, Eva Hesse, Joel Shapiro, Robert Smithson, and Richard Serra); artists whose recognition came earlier but who maintained a constant level of achievement during the Seventies (Christo, Carl Andre, Joseph Beuys, and Sol LeWitt); and artists

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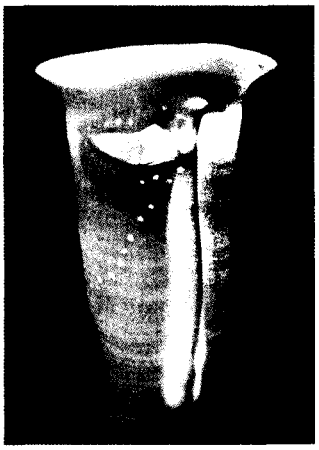
whose work in the Seventies underwent some sort of significant change (Frank Stella, Roy Lichtenstein, Philip Guston, Richard Diebenkorn, Chuck Close, Malcolm Morley).

Such an approach to recent art would at least have the virtue of corresponding to our actual experience of the art in question—and, not incidentally, to the artists' own experience of it. It could claim another virtue as well: it would relieve our curators and historians from the need to impose false and constricting formulas on what artists actually do and allow the flow of art, with all of its contradictions and complexities, to determine the boundaries of our discussion of it. As it is, one sometimes has the impression that it is to the formulaic categories—not to the art itself—that these curators and historians feel their primary intellectual loyalty.

RUDOLF STAFFEL



"LIGHT GATHERER," 1981
TRANSLUCENT PORCELAIN
7½" H. x 4½" DIAMETER

"LIGHT GATHERER," 1984
TRANSLUCENT PORCELAIN
10½" H. x 5¾" DIAMETER

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Letter from London

Welfare running dry

by Herb Greer

Early this year London was the scene of a kind of séance, with a circle of theatrical mandarins chanting "Money, money, money, MORE MONEY . . . ." This invocation raised the spirit of William Blake, who once snarled, "Where any view of money exists, Art cannot be carried on, but War only." This did not mean that money was irrelevant to the artist; quite the contrary. Financially hag-ridden himself, Blake knew well enough that the artist works best when he does not have to waste his sap worrying about the metabolic struggle of getting and spending.

This is of course the best justification for subsidizing theater in the Welfare State, but—the British being what they are, in practice it is not so straightforward as that. These pecuniary bellowings occur each mid-winter because of what the *Times* calls a balance of terror among the clients of the Arts Council. It stems from the fact that recipients of State largesse in the theater are not grant-funded; they are simply guaranteed against loss up to a certain point. This means strait budgets plus loud and very public pleas for wider limits, with dire prophecies of disaster if these are not forthcoming. The biggest clients usually have the strongest lungs in this chorus, and this year it was Sir Peter Hall of the National Theatre who out-bleated all the rest. When the Greater London Council also threatened to hold back its share of cash help for the National, the lamentations of Sir Peter redoubled and rose to a furious pitch on all the media, calling in question the very survival of the South Bank's great playhouse.[1]

Since every form of theater from Covent Garden's Royal Opera House to the pub shows on the Fringe appears to be flourishing just now, these offstage howls and groans appear less related to the survival of the art than to the scramblings of a pressure group to keep and if possible increase its share of the taxpayers' limited pot. Arts Council Chairman Sir William Rees-Mogg would like to change the system to allow direct funding, and spread more of the financial aid into the provinces. But the centripetal pull of London remains intense, and there is powerful resistance to the chairman's plans inside the Arts Council itself. So the brumal ritual of breast-beating will be with us for a while yet.

It is seldom noted that Blake's remark about money and the carrying on of Art applies to the audience, too. The proof of this lies in an unwelcome effect of the winter's nummary-mummery on a normal evening in

1 This gesture was part of the GLC's campaign against a Tory government measure which would limit the powers of local authorities to collect taxes. The GLC's gesture has nothing to do with theater or the arts but is a cynical exercise in politics. At the same time the GLC is getting ready to allocate £350,000 to an "Arts in Danger" Festival; as I write, it is having problems in finding ways to spend the money.

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the theater: one is continually distracted from the show by a nagging curiosity about how much everything costs, on both sides of the proscenium. This is what happened to me when I went to see the Royal Ballet's new production of *The Nutcracker* at Covent Garden. Some London reviewers were sniffy about this cotton-candy confection, which was in part an attempt to revive the old Lev Ivanov version of the ballet. The lack of "dazzling dancers" was decried, as was the "plodding" stagecraft. But the complaints implied solemn criteria that do not always fit well when applied to what is really a carnival, a celebration of the Christmas holiday with spectacle and the delicious music of Tchaikovsky, set to a loose, rambling fairy tale (the production was closer than usual to the original E. T. A. Hoffmann story). On the level of glittering masque and entertainment it succeeded well enough, whether or not it was a feast for balletomanic aficionados.

As a theatrical *occasion* it was very interesting. I use the word "occasion" to include the audience and the unusual front-of-house decor. This was not the work of Julia Trevelyan Oman, who did the production's rich designs. It was contributed by the Knightsbridge department store Harvey Nichols as part of the opening night's charity gala, and left intact for the run of the ballet. Harvey Nichols would not say what their work cost, but it did not look cheap: foyer, grand staircase, and the crush bar behind the dress circle were draped with lush quantities of artificial fir, thickly hung with gewgaws to suggest early nineteenth-century Christmas tree decorations: gold-painted walnuts, clusters of mustard-colored achilea, tied bunches of real cinnamon sticks, bright ribbons, angels, and trinkets, and fragrant pomanders which infused the air with an unusual and strong perfume. It matched the luxury of the Royal Opera House, with its gold and scarlet-trimmed auditorium, the champagne bar in the foyer, and the general opulence which begins with the top-hatted doorman who bows you out of your taxi under the high palladian façade.

One does not go out to such a place as though it were a stepped-up version of a cinema. The old sneer about going to the opera or the ballet to be seen was always an expression of envy, and misplaced anyhow; a show of elegance was part of the evening's ceremony, helping to sustain the sense of occasion and the special excitement inside the great gleaming hall. Something like this is still seen on gala nights, but it was not like that for the performance that I saw. When a woman came into the stalls in a blue evening gown, with an escort in black tie, it was a mild shock, almost embarrassing, because the audience was not a diamond horseshoe but a collection of soberly dressed refugees from a stockholders' meeting. Higher up, the "gods" (the gallery and the slips) has always been relatively scruffy, a haven for students and the like; but this highlighted the elegance of the rest. Now the contrast is, as often as not, muted. During the interval the crowd in the crush bar was sleek and fashionable, but depressingly discreet, with none of the exuberance and joy that was uttered by the ambiance of the theater itself and in the production. Only the children in the audience were dressed up to the place and the moment.

Of course part of this is a modern tendency to casual dress, but there is more to it than sartorial fashion. The striking contrast between theater and show on the one hand and audience on the other expresses a break in sensibility between elements that were once harmonious and mutually enhancing. And where the sense of the occasion has thus weakened, its cost has risen enormously. Institutions like the Royal Opera House and the National Theatre have budgets in seven figures and are now dependent on the patronage of government (though individual productions can receive private sponsorship as well). They do not grow upon the surplus wealth of the community as part, so to speak, of its cultural exuberance; they compete for tax revenue with the National Health Service, the Armed Forces, and other branches of government which the taxpayer is compelled to subsidize.

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The share of these big theaters is justified either by simple pride in excellent (or at least spectacular) products, or by their practical value as tourist attractions. But the profit from visitors does not match the subsidy, and there is still a streak of Cromwellian puritanism in British society that resents the expense of such frivolity, not to mention the loud demands for more. This resentment is the stronger because the demands come from those who provide recreation for a very small minority of the community, plus a few visiting foreigners. There are also objections from smaller theater companies outside London who feel financially threatened and see the share of revenue given to the big London centers as outsized—depriving smaller companies of the chance to present more "relevant" fare to a wider audience.

These grumblings are a greater long-run danger to major houses like Covent Garden and the National (not to mention the English National Opera Company at the London Coliseum) than the immediate squeeze which so alarms Sir Peter. And if they should survive as subsidized national showcases under a future left-wing government, there would be the inexorable question of strings which are tied to gifts of public money under such regimes. These are foreshadowed in GLC sponsorship of political art, and in its plan to politicize the Hayward Gallery, evicting the Arts Council and staging exhibitions of more "relevant" or "representative" art by women (*qua* women), homosexuals (*qua* homosexuals), blacks (*qua* blacks), etc. A voluntary left-wing bias already exists, for instance, at the Royal Shakespeare Company. A swerve in political currents could spread that bias into other major subsidized theaters, or the subsidized arts generally. Though the electorate has for the time being rejected radical leftism, the present economic turmoil keeps Britain volatile, with the center of political gravity resting largely on the shoulders of one person. If anything should happen to Mrs. Thatcher the consequences are uncertain; though the Cromwellians are down, they are not dead. These modern Roundheads are like the distant Turks advancing toward the frontiers of the late Roman Empire in Byzantium. One remembers those late Byzantine Emperors who were too poor to wear robes of real gold as their forebears had done. Instead they wore gold-painted leather to impress the barbarians. There is still real gold in Britain but there is gilding too, much of it in the theater. That gap between the anachronistic splendor of Covent Garden's Opera House and the dull style of its audience was something like a crack in the gilt, with the somber color of leather showing through.

With today's plated surfaces so crazed and flaking, there is a great temptation to look back for comfort and a sense of permanent values into ages when the gold seems with wistful hindsight to have been purer, heavier, and more enduring. This illusion is sustained in some degree by the survival of certain great works over a wide distance in time. Beyond the obvious example of Shakespeare, I am thinking of the earlier English Medieval Mystery Plays, which are being staged at the National Theatre's small Cottesloe auditorium. It is a collection of plays from the York, Wakefield, Chester, and Coventry cycles, "in a version by the group" (i.e., the company) and the poet Tony Harrison. This Biblical epic is split into three parts, of which I have seen part one, *The Nativity*. It is built around Old Testament events—the Creation, the Fall, the Flood, Abraham and Isaac—leading up to the opening of the New Testament: the Birth of Christ, the massacre of the innocents, and the death of Herod with his soldiers at a banquet.

The auditorium—a big square room—is rigged up to look like the courtyard of an inn, with farm implements and dartboards for decor, porch-like terraces for spectators, and an atmosphere suffused by fine dank mist, half-lit by perforated canisters which look and flicker like candle-lamps. The audience is encouraged to go down onto the main floor where the plays are taking place, with exits and entrances made through

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the body of the crowd. This creates a shifting series of spaces in which the short plays are set with an easy flow of action and a fine series of technical effects. These begin with the first appearance of God, raised to the apex of the auditorium by a forklifted man-sized bucket and illuminated by a huge towering cross of light beams shining through the mist.

The texts are cleverly adapted, retaining the rough alliterative quality of the verse and much of its strange vocabulary. The company performs in a low-key style, giving a feeling of village laymen stepping into the roles as they did in the middle ages. There is nothing muted or soft-centered about the result, nor anything of *faux-naïf.* The Biblical pageant moves with dignity and force, interrupted with bouts of village dancing and brightened with flashes of theatrical imagination. Brian Glover's God, heavy-set, billiard-bald, and smocked, is not bearded but pudgy-featured, smiling as he contemplates his creation, or severe as he casts Lucifer into a hellishly burning cauldron. Satan (Lucifer), played fiercely by Jack Shepherd in a black scaly gown, appears in Eden with a queue of hissing, simpering followers, a collective serpent. The soil around a large potted tree of knowledge literally gives birth to Adam and Eve, who rise naked except for the dirt clinging to their damp bodies. The Medieval meaning of "mystery" (a craft or trade) is shown when the play of Abraham and Isaac is performed with a butcher's block as altar, surrounded by a ring of blue-aproned butchers holding their whetting steels. These strips of metal are then interwoven to form a *Magen-David,* which later becomes the gleaming Star of Bethlehem.

There is no intermission. The two-and-a-half-hour evening reaches its climax with Christ's birth, the massacre of the innocents in the midst of the crowding audience, and the appearance of a white-robed figure carrying a large scythe. This apparition leads Herod and his murderous soldiers in a snake-dance of Death through the audience. When this grim ceremony is over, the company leads the house in a hymn, and then bursts into a joyful surge of dancing, bringing actors and audience together in a general celebration.

I watched this wonderful show, knowing that in April the Cottesloe will be closed by Sir Peter Hall on the excuse of cuts in the government's arts subsidy. In the jargon of Whitehall Civil Servants such a gesture is called "sore-thumbing"; this means implementing necessary financial cuts in a way that will cause maximum public embarrassment to the government. It is like a hospital shutting down a kidney unit and protesting violently, when they might have reduced union-protected ancillary staff. This way Sir Peter can mourn a part of his organization which specialized in the mounting of new work and particularly imaginative productions of old plays, and is currently offering some of the best theater to be seen in London. These are the games that people play in that mare's nest where politics and art become entangled.

Now I am going to leave solemn matters for a bit, and offer this little parody of Cole Porter:

> Al Pacino's done it, Dustin's done it, now even good old Charlton Heston's done it . . . .

The falling-in-love referred to here is a rather sweet *manie* which affects American movie stars from time to time, a compulsion to play in London and so be recognized as *real* actors. This may have something to do with fragments of genuine gold still clinging to Melpomene over here, or it may be a simple cultural inferiority complex. But the Yanks keep coming over, and the latest arrival is Mr. Heston in *The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial,* installed at the Queen's Theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue.

This is an interesting play for the time—in some ways more pertinent than when it was first staged in the 1950s. Wouk's original novel and play were correctives to sentimental war fiction which idealized the ranks and made officers *per se* into quasi-fascist monsters. During the Vietnam War these stereo-

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types had great play from the protest movement, and now the Peace People are making similar fictions with Tory politicians and Ronald Reagan in the officer roles.

Heston's impact onstage is not as striking as what he has achieved in his film personae, and his physical stolidity misses the acute neurotic edge which the part of Queeg must have for maximum effect. But in this production the play is not harmed by the lack, because it makes for balance between Queeg and the lawyer Barney Greenwald who destroys him. This part is also played by a film star, the British actor Ben Cross from *Chariots of Fire*. His performance is hemmed in by different flaws. He has lived in the United States and played American parts before, so he does manage an authentic accent. But it tends to slip under emotional pressure and, with his manners, become more blue-collar than it should be. Much of this might have been polished away if Heston himself had not directed, with no "outside eye" to give perspective to the performances. But, strange to say, it does enhance the content of the play instead of clouding it in brilliant thespian fireworks.

Unfortunately for Wouk, the highlighting of his theme also exposes a rather basic fault in his own procedure. His defense of the career officer is sound enough. Such men did indeed help the Allies to hold out while the rest of us were girding to fight Hitler and Tojo. (The British may deserve a little more credit for this than the Americans.) But Queeg is an awful example to illustrate the species. Being an emotional cripple and a neurotic coward unsuited to the stress of combat, he is not the sort of officer easily imagined as keeping any dangerous enemy at bay, in peace or in war. If the safety of democracy had really depended on people like Queeg, it is very probable that the Germans and the Japanese *would* have met at the Missouri River, and rendered Barney Greenwald's dear old gray-haired mother down into soap. Since a man as subtle and as intelligent as Barney Greenwald would certainly be aware of this,

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there is a false note about his outburst in the play's final party scene; putting Queeg on a pedestal as some kind of unsung hero strikes a false note. But the courtroom scenes still ring true, with the satisfying destruction of the psychiatric testimony in favor of Queeg, and the ghastly moment in which the court martial sees the Captain for what he is.

It seems odd that a plea for charity in a harsh military context should be marred by sentimentality, while the argument for decency should be strong and solid in a light play about English schoolgirls of the 1920s. *Daisy Pulls It Off* (i.e., succeeds) was distilled from the dated novels of the girls' writer Angela Brazil (pronounced Brazzle) and produced, just a few doors up the street from Wouk's play, at the Globe Theatre. It is the story of young Daisy Meredith, who comes to the modestly posh Grangewood School for Girls as a scholarship student. She is bright, pretty, and sympathetic, but suspect to some at Grangewood because she comes from a state school. She runs a gauntlet of snobbery, jealousy, trickery, meanness, and adult confusions, always showing that she has, as we would say, the right stuff. By the end she has proved herself triumphantly not only as a scholar but as a good sort. Her accomplishments include saving the life of her chief tormentor among the other girls, and solving a complex astronomical riddle to discover a long-hidden treasure on the premises, so rescuing the school from bankruptcy and imminent sale.

Now this is clearly comic-strip material. But the essentially valid core of it prevents the show from degenerating into utter triviality. This is the public (British for private) school morality of the early twentieth century, including most vitally the obligation to tell the truth, and not to "sneak" (inform) for personal advantage; to behave decently toward members of one's own peer group even if they are hostile for some (mistaken) reason; to help those who are less fortunate, whether they are one's peers or not; and through the application of altruistic virtue raise the general moral tone of society, so that good may triumph over evil. Does this sound like a nauseating Pollyanna lecture? It might well be, except for the tone and flair of the production. The girls are played by adult actresses without mocking the innocent seriousness of children, but gently guying the bizarre language and style of the period, with adjectives like "ripping," "spiffing," and "wizard," almost as exotic for the young British of the 1980s as for Americans. The teachers are not stuffy clowns, but eccentrics affectionately portrayed, and the perfectly controlled acting makes this skillful pastiche theatrically believable enough to hold an adult audience, finally moving them to delighted cheers. While the moral homily is embodied by Daisy Meredith and what happens to her, the proceeding is satisfying because it is fun—never too serious, allowing for our adult perception that such virtue is, in the real world, a sometime thing.

The wonderful quality of public values is that they seem to be abstractions, but are among the most dynamic tools for manipulating the emotions and behavior of real people, in politics as in the theater. Contrasting instances of this are furnished by two other plays in London, one American and the other translated from the *fin-de-siècle* French. *A Little Hotel on the Side* is John Mortimer's version of *L'Hôtel du Libre Échange* by Georges Feydeau, directed at the National Theatre by Jonathan Lynn. *Times* critic Irving Wardle reckoned it the best farce production in London for eighteen years, since the National's last Feydeau revival, *A Flea in Her Ear*. I did not see that, but if it was on the level of the present production, the loss to me was not very great. "Farce characters," said the famous English farce writer Ben Travers, "are absolutely true to life. It's only what happens that makes them funny."

As to what happens: Pinglet, a building contractor, is fed up with his bawling harridan of a wife. His friend and neighbor Henri is obsessed with architecture and neglects his own wife, who is pretty and aching for love. She and Pinglet arrange an assignation at a seedy hotel, but everyone in the play turns up there during the second act, and

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the affair's consummation is frustrated by the general hullabaloo. The last act concludes with everyone attached to his or her proper spouse; it transpires that adultery is really too much trouble, and monogamy is the best policy. To complicate the action and add to the hilarity there are sundry policemen, boring guests, little girls, and an inspector from the Department of Public Morality.

Are the characters true to life? Well—something queer happens to all but the very best English actors when they find themselves playing French farce:

> O there be players that I have seen play—and heard others praise, and that highly—not to speak it profanely, that, neither having the accent of Christian, nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.

Shakespeare would recognize his bunglers on the stage of the National's Olivier Theatre. With a single exception the principal players' manner was horribly *knowing,* mugging, capering, posturing, indulging in the crudest buffoonery, pushing performance in some cases (notably Pinglet's wife Angélique) beyond caricature into the grotesque. With every jerk and smirk it is announced that the actors are being, haw, haw, FUNNY. In a theater where you normally see first-quality acting even in bad material, this is a posse of thespians making fools of themselves, and urging the audience to laugh at that. On the night I saw it there was laughter, but it was the tittering and giggling variety which responds to a nudge and a wink rather than to what is genuinely funny.

Jonathan Lynn's prettily set and dressed production does offer one bit of relief from the general clodhoppery. It is Michael Bryant's smooth, expert performance in the second act as Bastien, the greasy, dexterous manager of the scabby *maison de rendezvous,* orchestrating the chaos with a splendidly world-weary moustached aplomb. Barring a few of the minor parts and perhaps the would-be adulteress next door to Pinglet, the rest would be properly at home in one of the scruffy twice-nightly repertory companies which used to entertain the British provinces in the 1950s.

I began my discussion of this play by referring to public values. It is their effect which marks it indelibly as a revived museum piece, leaches out much of its emotional value, and probably drives the cast to their clownish extremes. The real juice of the plot and characters is squeezed from the peculiar nineteenth-century attitude to sex, and in particular to the open display of adultery on a stage. Today this is pretty tame stuff, but ninety years ago the extramarital arena was more exciting. Not the buffoonery but the sexual mores carried the heaviest charge and therefore the highest potential for laughter. There are those who disagree. My theater-history professor in college once lectured his class on the subject, and said with pungent sarcasm, "Climbing women—that's funny." But "climbing women" *is* funny, because sex is a serious matter when you come down to it, if not in just the same way that it was at the turn of the century. Without digging too far into this complex subject, it can be said that the laughter and final satisfaction in *L'Hôtel du Libre Échange* came from the bald challenge to marital morality and the frustration of that challenge by farcical circumstance. After almost a century the increased disposability of marriage has diluted the public importance of all this and so thinned out the natural drollery of *A Little Hotel on the Side.* I suppose it would be mean to blame the National Theatre actors and their director too much for sensing this and trying to compensate for it with unnatural foolery. Only I wish they had not overcompensated.

Values and emotions are mixed more violently at the Duchess Theatre in Catherine Street. There is also relief, but of a rather sinister kind. *Extremities,* by the American playwright William Mastrosimone, was used

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in New York as a vehicle for Farrah Fawcett and Susan Sarandon. In London it moves into the big league, with a major Shakespearean actress, Helen Mirren, as Marjorie the embattled heroine.

The plot is simple: "Between Trenton and Princeton, New Jersey, where the cornfield meets the highway," Marjorie is attacked in a country house where she is waiting for two woman friends. She is sexually humiliated and very nearly raped by a ferocious proletarian brute called Raul. The Chicano or Puerto Rican flavor of this snarl-like name heightens the WASP audience response with a peppery appeal to prejudice. Having aroused fury by the sexual attack, Mastrosimone evokes malicious satisfaction by having Marjorie blind the rapist with a poisonous fly-spray. When the lights come up on the second scene, Raul is bound and caged up in the fireplace. Marjorie's two housemates arrive and are duly appalled.

It is not the near-rape which worries them, but the treatment of poor Raul. One friend, though she herself was actually raped once, is not sure this is right. She is not sure about anything, and contributes little more than a whining obligato of weakness. The other lady is very sensible and liberal and wants to call the police, but no proof exists of Raul's attack. He loudly denies it, claiming that Marjorie enticed him in, teased him, and then blinded him when he accepted her overtures.

We in the audience saw what really happened, and heard Raul's very colorful account of what he was going to do. We gnashed our teeth when Raul forced Marjorie to grope him in the crotch. But now she cannot refute his lies and denials, which are growing more piteous by the second. We cannot help sympathizing when she proposes to solve the problem in the style of Bernhard Goetz, and goes into the garden to dig Raul's grave.

If the liberal sensible friend does call the police, Raul will certainly be let loose and come back to finish the job on Marjorie, and/or rape some other wretched woman. But Marjorie's pals cannot believe this. So they let him out of the fireplace to kneel on the floor with his hands tied, pleading for water, pity, and more help from the two women. When Marjorie returns, the debate over what to do with him tours all the thickets of prejudice which surround rape and its legal consequences. Raul works on the women with a veritable anthology of threats, lies, technicalities, and pleas for mercy. It is the familiar scene of the bestial criminal and his tricky defense attorney (combined in Raul) coddling the jury with mendacious tactics in order to secure an undeserved acquittal. As it becomes more and more likely that Raul will succeed, Marjorie's rage increases, and one can feel the echo of this rage in the audience. Then, near the end, something happens which reminded me of a dreadful play by Arthur Wing Pinero, *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith,* reviewed by George Bernard Shaw in 1895. This is his description of the climax:

> A clergyman appears at this crisis, and offers her a Bible. She promptly pitches it into the stove; and a thrill of horror runs through the audience as they see, in imagination, the whole Christian Church tottering before their eyes. Suddenly, with a wild scream, she plunges her hand into the glowing stove and pulls out the Bible again. The Church is saved; the curtain descends amid thunders of wild applause.

At the point where Marjorie's (and the audience's) fury and frustration are becoming unbearable, the liberal lady wants to untie Raul. The struggle to prevent this opens his jacket and there, strapped to his chest, is a large ugly sheath knife. The friends shrink away. They know what sort of animal carries a knife like *that.* And Raul, who until this moment has been denying everything with adamantine stubbornness, including his own name (at one point he calls himself "Mentira," which is Spanish for "lie"), abruptly launches into a detailed confession of several previous rapes. Why he does this is not clear; it is like Mrs. Ebbsmith's sudden change of mind about the Bible. Perhaps he assumes that since the

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women have seen his knife (hmmmmmmm) they know everything, so he might as well spill his guts.

What *is* clear by now is that the play is not about rape at all. It is about vigilante revenge, and it cheapens the issue. Vengeance has a claim on the human spirit; it is an attempt to restore a balance that is thrown out of joint by wrongdoing. The imbalance of Raul's attack on Marjorie and the possibility, very strong, that he will not only get away with it but continue his career as a rapist are not cleared away by the *dénouement* of his confession. Any lawyer could shut it out of court on the grounds that the three women had coerced him to say what he did, after ganging up on him and blinding him. This, anyhow, is the logic of what happens. But the audience is not being prompted to think logically. It has spent the evening in the grip of a vicarious lust (usually stronger than the first-hand species) for revenge which the playwright has progressively frustrated and inflamed. The fact that the coup at the end is not believable is beside the point; it is *needed* so badly that the audience is prepared to swallow a gulp of dramaturgical rubbish in order to answer the need.

The applause at the end of *Extremities* was not thundering and wild; it was more like a sigh of relief. Something had been saved, all right, but it was definitely not the Christian Church. The implication was not that *caritas* and law should prevail over blind vengeance, but that the retaliatory lust stimulated and exploited by the play is not wrong after all, because this dirty foul-mouthed Latin blue-collar thug admits that he really is a nasty piece of work. In short, Mastrosimone is in the business here of filling the little Duchess Theatre with a lynch mob every night, screwing their emotions up to screaming pitch, and then reassuring them that they are really quite right to feel the way they do. I will not comment on the morality of this; it speaks for itself. But it does seem a strange way for a playwright—one of Latin extraction at that—to use his strong dramatic talent.

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Architecture

Robert Venturi and the decorated shed

by William H. Jordy

If anyone can be called the father of postmodern architecture in America it is Robert Venturi, however reluctantly he admits his paternity. Some would say that postmodernist architecture has two fathers, Venturi and Charles Moore, who is perhaps a bit more willing to acknowledge the child than Venturi. Still, it is Venturi's book, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture,* published by the Museum of Modern Art in 1966, that provided the manifesto for the movement—if, indeed, the "movement" exists as more than a ubiquitous attitude. Certainly as a manifesto Venturi's book has none of the commitment and belligerence that characterized modernism during the Teens and Twenties. Venturi himself refers to *Complexity and Contradiction* as a "gentle manifesto." His diminuendo seems appropriate given his oblique program, which merely calls for a "non-straightforward architecture." Even so, Vincent Scully, in his introduction, proclaimed the book "probably the most important writing on the making of architecture since Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture* in 1923." Such it has turned out to be.

Thus, the comprehensive exhibition of the work of the firm, "Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown; A Generation of Architecture," which is currently making the rounds of eight American museums, is an event of consequence.[1] I caught it at Princeton University, a particularly appropriate place. Venturi is an alumnus of both its college and its school of architecture, and his alma mater has recently become a patron. A short walk from the exhibition stands the recently completed Gordon Wu Hall, which appreciatively mocks the prevalent mock Tudor of its surroundings. A little further along and one comes to the Molecular Biology Building, which is under construction. Laboratory specialists have charge of the innards, but Venturi has clothed its exterior in a sheathing of polychromatic brick in diamond patterns of red, cream, and purple. It looks to such raucous High Victorian descendants of medievalism as Keble College, Oxford.

As if an exhibition were not enough, a selection of articles and talks by Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, his wife and partner in the firm, will shortly appear. These essays go all the way back to Venturi's first publica-

1 "Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown: A Generation of Architecture" was organized by Stephen Prokopoff, director of the Krannert Art Museum at the University of Illinois, Urbana, where the exhibition was first shown early last year. It will be on view at the American Institute of Architects Foundation in Washington, D.C., until June 9, and thereafter at the Contemporary Art Center in Cincinnati (July 11-August 24), the University Art Museum in Albuquerque, New Mexico (September 3-October 27), and the Otis Art Institute of the Parsons School of Design in Los Angeles (January 10-February 15, 1986). The exhibition's catalogue was published by the Krannert Art Museum (48 pages, $3.50).

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tion, which was an essay written after a study-trip to Italy following graduation from Princeton's school of architecture. It commented on the disastrous effect on Michelangelo's Campidoglio of subsequent building in the area. Hence, the title for the collection, *A View from the Campidoglio.*[2] In a spiritual sense, Venturi and Scott Brown stand on Michelangelo's elevated piazza peering across the years at much of what they have said, just as the retrospective exhibition surveys much of what they have designed.

Venturi insists that the achievements celebrated in the exhibition and book are group efforts. Of course, in architecture this is usually the case, and architects of Venturi's generation have been especially generous in acknowledging the contributions of their principal aides. But Venturi is more insistent than most in the matter. Hence, "Venturi" here appears most of the time as a convenient shorthand for the organization that shares the work. Collective effort or not, however, there *is* a persona in the group which is also Venturi.

Complexity and Contradiction, for which Venturi alone was responsible, argued for a return to the ambiguity of form and meaning which has characterized much architecture in the past. It stood against the virtues of clarity, homogeneity, and rationality espoused by modernism. Its inspiration derived as much from literary New Criticism as from architectural sources, even as New Criticism was becoming passé. Fully a third of the footnotes for Venturi's text refer to such critics as T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, Kenneth Burke, Stanley Edgar Hyman, and William Empson. Indeed, Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* provided the veritable model for Venturi's enterprise. Although Venturi makes no special point of the number, it so happens that his principles for achieving complexity and contradiction are (if I have counted right) also seven.

Complexity and Contradiction borrows from art history, too, especially from the investigations of mannerism which, in the Fifties and Sixties, were both fashionable and innovative. Tiny illustrations dot the wide margins of the original edition like slides scattered on a light table. They include many mannerist examples, as well as examples of what could be construed as mannerist aspects in the whole of Western architectural history.

If Venturi's short book had concentrated solely on the New Critical and mannerist aspects of architecture, it might have been an overwrought recommendation to pursue the precious, elitist, and abstruse. But at a time when many other architects who wrote were indulging in the latest structuralist and semiotic fads, there was a resonant common sense about *Complexity and Contradiction* which caught the empiricist spirit of the decade.

Venturi's volume appeared about the same time as two other American books which have also been vastly influential in conditioning the way we have come to consider the built environment. First, in 1960, there was Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City*; then, in 1961, Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities.* Along with *Complexity and Contradiction,* which came along five years later, these books took a stance against what had by the Sixties become the fag-end desiccation of modern architecture and city planning as it had taken shape in the Twenties. They opposed its abstractness, its claim that there was a universal style expressive of "modernity," its partiality for smashing the old in order to get on with the new, its confidence that the profession acting on enlightened principle from above knew what was best for those who inhabited whatever brave new worlds were conjured up.

Kevin Lynch repudiated the grand schemes of the professional modernists and turned to the person-in-the-street. How did the average person perceive the city? Lynch turned to commonsense tactics, too, such as asking

2 *A View from the Campidoglio: Selected Essays 1957-1984,* by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown; edited by Peter Arnall, Ted Bickford, and Catherine Bergart; Harper & Row, 192 pages, $25.

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the casual passerby for directions or schematic maps drawn from memory, both in a city of "high imageability" like Boston and in one of "low imageability" like Newark, New Jersey. He ascertained that these personal images of the city were built of five components: paths, edges, districts, nodes (that is, centers of activity), and landmarks. To Lynch, the planner should start from the popular, interiorized image of the place and strengthen it, instead of imposing on it some overarching scheme of presumed betterment.

With similar concern for generating ideas from everyday experience, Jane Jacobs took as her starting point the neighborhood in Greenwich Village where she lived. She maintained that the planner should look to the chaos which works in the Village rather than to a plan which fails when it is made into a project. Instead of emphasizing "open space" (which too often sinks into barrenness), the planner should pay attention to street life; instead of creating superblocks he should preserve the liveliness of small blocks; instead of aiming for the homogeneity of buildings which are new and zoned for a single use, he should allow old buildings to mix with the new, in order to attract a range of tenants and to encourage the mingling of commerce, light industry, and residence. Like Venturi, Lynch and Jacobs lauded the complexity and contradiction of a "difficult order" wrested from a seemingly chaotic mix of elements. They favored letting these elements coalesce into a working relationship with one another while each stubbornly maintained a degree of distinctness and obdurateness.

This empirical and populist cast of mind in the Sixties conditioned the attitude of many professionals and intellectuals who saw themselves immersed in the chaos which surrounded them. They accepted the continuous improvisation it called for, and they welcomed the recalcitrance of whatever refused to "fit in" and yet which had to be accommodated. To be sure, the populist who was "with it" united at times with the elitist who was a little bit "above it." In the professions, there was a decided antipathy by this time to the idea of the "hero architect," an idea which had agitated much discussion in the late Forties and Fifties. At that time it was asked: Who in the new generation of modernists would take the place of Le Corbusier, Mies, Gropius, Aalto, and Wright? In short, who would be the future "form givers" of the modern movement? Would it be Louis Kahn (as it turned out especially to be), or Eero Saarinen, or Paul Rudolph, or Gordon Bunshaft—or (moving down the ladder) possibly Minoru Yamasaki, or Edward Stone? By the Sixties the idea of an imperious "form giver" dispensing his largesse to the profession (and thence to the populace) by means of "major monuments" had begun to seem pompous, if not puerile. In the decade of Pop, such simple-minded promotion seemed passé.

In his book, Venturi argued that complexity and contradiction could be achieved by playing architectural masterpieces against vernacular and pop commercial building. Like many architects of the period, Venturi had been especially excited by *The Shingle Style,* Vincent Scully's enormously influential account of the importance of the late nineteenth-century shingle vacation houses that dotted the New England seacoast. With their big gables and roofs textured all over in shingles, their generous porches, bays, windows, dormers, and prominent chimneys, these houses were mostly vernacular in inspiration, but they were sprinkled with "high style" classicized ornaments as the enthusiasm for neo-colonial made its way into the regional fabric. It was in Rome, while he pondered the desecration of the Campidoglio by its later neighbors, that Venturi came across Scully's book. "There, in Rome, *The Shingle Style* hit me with special impact," Venturi recalled. "It was the contrast between all the great monuments around me, and these humble houses from home. The book made me homesick." Several of his first works took the shingle-style house as their starting point, and the influence has stayed with Venturi ever since, and with many in his professional generation.

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Only seven of the two-hundred-fifty-three images in *Complexity and Contradiction* showed the lowbrow end of the building spectrum, but they epitomized its range of possibilities. There were views of Times Square, a strip of commercial development, a subdivision, and a thruway interchange. There was also a picture showing Robert Rauchenberg's use of an actual straight-backed chair, dropped from a canvas of smudged color, and Jasper Johns's triple-decked version of the American flag. The concluding images in the book paired Jefferson's University of Virginia and a view of an American Main Street cluttered with signs and wires. Peter Blake had used the same rather unfair comparison in *God's Own Junkyard* (1964), a diatribe on the environmental disorder of America. But Venturi asked: ". . . is not Main Street almost all right? . . . what slight twist of context will make [it] all right? . . . The seemingly chaotic juxtapositions of honky-tonk elements express an intriguing kind of vitality and validity, and they produce an unexpected approach to unity as well."

After *Complexity and Contradiction,* the focus of Venturi's investigations into possible sources for architectural inspiration swung from the Great Tradition to Pop. The catalyst for that shift was a pilgrimage to Las Vegas made by Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, and a group of Yale architectural students. *Learning from Las Vegas* appeared in 1972, inspiring a critical furor. With good reason, most architects deplored the commercial Strip. But, the Venturi pilgrims asked, should prejudice be set aside in order to examine what is so evidently (and, it would seem, so inevitably) a massive chunk of the built environment? If so, where better to study whatever can be learned from the phenomenon of the Strip than where it is big, brash, and as lavishly financed as in Vegas? (About the same time, Charles Moore was prowling Disneyland, which by comparison is genial, sugarcoated, atmospheric, well-manicured pop, akin to some of the same qualities in Moore's architecure. At least the Strip is authentically what it is.)

Architecturally and urbanistically, the components of the Strip are all too familiar: a superhighway flanked by super signs that entice prospective customers to super parking lots, all of which serve the rambunctious "decorated sheds" that house casinos, night clubs, and hotels. By now "decorated shed" has passed from Venturi lingo into common parlance. In the Venturi group's sweeping application, the term refers to the most ubiquitous phenomenon in building—the anonymous box, a prototypical form to house the most various demands for shelter. In their more expansive moments, the Venturi team includes any box-like building within the net of their definition, from a Roman temple and a Renaissance palace to a MacDonald's or Burger King eatery.

It is an old populist trick to inflate the inferior by deflating the grand on the basis of some such simple, shared criterion as boxiness. But the box has special relevance to the current scene, for several reasons. In a time of high building costs and low building skills, the box is as cheaply and simply erected as any basic form of shelter. Technological developments in lighting and air conditioning make livable even a box of substantial size, which needs a door for entrance but no windows. (Indeed, the typical gambling casino is windowless, and, except for a plate-glass front, so is the typical supermarket.) In the modern movement, moreover, the stripped-down box came to be accepted as an ultimate statement of both *pure* shape and *pure* function, a cachet of the style. Deploring modern European architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright saw as mere "cardboard boxes" what Le Corbusier and fellow enthusiasts extolled as *"prism pure"* manifestations of an ineffable Neo-Platonic geometry. For an architectural style in which spatial volume took precedence over mural mass, the membrane-like skin which contained the volume was considered a mere package for the space, and of all the shapes a package can take, the box overwhelmingly predominates. Finally, aspects of contemporary culture—the automobile, mass consumption, high-keyed communication—have

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encouraged the package analogy for architecture. Like the false front in the traditional Western frontier town, one architectural box is differentiated from another—out of its transformed inner self—by scenery, decoration, or sign. Thus, MacDonald's can be distinguished from Burger King, Stardust from Caesar's Palace. With a change of wrap the failed gas station, sheathed in plywood against vandalism, can become a doctor's office or a dry-cleaning establishment. As ubiquitous as the box has been throughout architectural history, never before has it been so insistently present, for functional, technological, ideological, and symbolic reasons.

The Venturi group argued that, in order to learn from the "decorated shed," one goes to the place where it most flamboyantly proclaims itself, in its sea of asphalt. And it was in Las Vegas that they came to realize that most modern buildings are, and should be, decorated sheds. They opposed their decorated shed to the "duck." Again, Peter Blake's earnest sermon against God's junkyard provided the example. At one point Blake held up to ridicule a Long Island roadside stand with the bad taste to assume the shape of a duck by way of advertising its specialty. Writing in the wake of the "hero architect" syndrome, before setting off for Vegas, the Venturi team complained that too many architects were creating ducks to their own glory—that is, buildings massed as highly sculptural, self-important entities. In their view, most commissions in the modern world called for no more than decorated sheds. Architects should, in their opinion, leave the ducks for exceptional occasions, and learn the lesson of the inherently "dull and ordinary" decorated shed. Venturi proved that he meant what he said by designing a number of decorated sheds in his own early work which subtly transform the conventional shopping mart, fire station, and housing project into a kind of double-take architecture. In his Bill-Ding Board project for a projected National Football Hall of Fame (1967), the exterior "architecture" consisted of an electronic billboard with something like the scale of a football field, over which flickered the great plays in the history of the game. The billboard lured patrons through a football-shaped opening and into a barrel-vaulted lean-to museum/shed behind. Inside, spotlights stabbed the dark boundless space, as in the Las Vegas casino, to light the enshrined relics of the gridiron. It was Sixties pop, to which Venturi has referred throughout his career with ascerbic wit and great visual finesse.

Complexity and Contradiction elicited some negative comment—the most consequential, if refutable, being that complexity and contradiction *per se* hardly provided the substance for a philosophy of architecture, but only a mode for manipulating forms. *Learning from Las Vegas,* however, created a substantial critical storm. The indignation against the populist aspects of Venturi's point of view was the greater because the climate within postmodernism was changing in the Seventies: more history, less pop. The reason might have been the aging of the generation. Even the essays in *View from the Campidoglio* reflect the shift, although Venturi and Scott Brown also remain true to lessons learned from Las Vegas. Venturi best expressed his present stand at Harvard in 1982, when he gave the annual Gropius Lecture. There he criticized the growing historicism in postmodernist architecture. Was it becoming too historical? Was it retreating to the eclecticism of the nineteenth century? Venturi denied that he was a postmodernist. He emphatically declared himself a modernist. Believing that only by holding fast to modernist principles could contemporary architecture continue to be relevant and escape the miasma of self-indulgent eclecticism.

Now there are various ways of remaining true to modernism during a time when its repudiation, as a postmodern label at least, dares to go no further than a prefix. One can of course continue in the modernist tradition by elaborating and transforming what has gone before. Richard Meier would be one of many examples. He has developed an

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individual style by extending Le Corbusier's works of the later Twenties—works which have come to represent the modern movement at its most intensely revolutionary moment—and crossing these with allusions to other aspects of modernism, such as De Stijl, Constructivism, Italian Neo-Rationalism, and Vienna Secession. He has reworked these possibilities into an unmistakably personal style. Alternatively, one can simply transform the technological look of an earlier phase of modernism into the hi-tech of the moment to create, for instance, the Citicorp building, a prism of blue glass and silver metal, or the Pompidou Centre, where mechanical innards spew into view.

These approaches have resulted in impressive buildings surely; but Venturi would criticize their premises. He would deplore the historical eclecticism of the first approach. He would argue that, even if eclecticism and historicism derive from the modern movement itself, the result will be nostalgia, preciosity, and overrefinement. So too, paradoxically, with the hi-tech approach. Hi-tech was a legitimate preoccupation for early modernism; indeed, modernism could not have occurred without taking a strong technological stand, symbolically if not actually. But surely we no longer feel the same way about the architectural promise of blatant technology, when its ultimate statements hover between the polished discreetness of a corporate headquarters and the futuristic pizzazz of a star-wars movie set.

Venturi has opposed another trend of postmodernist times, especially prevalent since the mid-Seventies: that is, the tug of more distant history. He particularly condemns what he sees as the nature of the current fervor for classicism. Not that he opposes classicism: he can justly demonstrate his own use of classical themes and allusion. It is variously the literalism, the abstractness, and the seriousness of the movement that concerns him. In the literal mode, neoclassicism verges on replication, with mannered variation. In the abstract mode, neoclassicism revives principles and typologies as denatured generalization and codifica-

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tion, to mimic the universality of the so-called International Style of modernism with an International Style of postmodernism. And in both modes, he senses the kind of dead seriousness about neo-classical design that came to afflict doctrinaire modernist theory, until modernism eventually became arrogantly contemptuous of whatever failed to meet its own criteria for "good" architecture.

Of course, Venturi's view of the current architectural situation is no doubt skewed, and surely simplistic with respect to other positions. But one must generalize on the opposition's position in order to fix one's own. Venturi and his cohorts would project themselves into William James's "blooming, buzzing confusion" of the pluralistic world around us today, with its low-budget, decorated sheds awash in all the phenomena of urban sprawl and insistent communications imagery. And they would face all this, not with the reformer's zeal, nor with the elitist's good taste, but with an intelligence that is ironic and paradoxical. Truly, no other architect of Venturi's stature has so consistently or forcefully maintained his identity with Sixties populism.

It is the decorated shed that principally enables Venturi to hold onto the two extremes of his design dialectic. It can be read as the purist box of modernism or the pop-vernacular box of Vegas. Repeatedly the recent exhibition shows Venturi holding onto the big volume of the decorated shed. A quick, preliminary sketch by Venturi himself for the principal elevation of Wu Hall, done with a felt-tipped pen on tracing paper, shows a ghosted rectangle, from which the complications of the building mass materialize as cuts into, and minor addenda out of, the rectangle. Similar preliminary sketches for other buildings indicate how deftly Venturi manipulates the overall shape of his design.

As sharpness and tautness of outline incisively bounded the membrane containers of earlier modern architecture, so control of outline contains the shape of Venturi's building. One immediately senses the role of contour as it holds the overall shapes of two little shingled and gabled boxes on Nantucket Island for two branches of a single family (1970-71), the one box compact and vertical, the other spread and relaxed. Despite their modest size, both possess a fierce presence which recalls, in a playful vacation mood, a pair of Greek temples against the sea, the memory of which, in fact, Venturi meant to conjure up. The wooden strips which bind the edges of the houses are extraordinarily thin, as much drawn as carpentered—or perhaps taped, in the way prints are sometimes sealed between mat and glass.

The importance of the drawn contour as the containing boundary for the volume of the building is literalized in Venturi's skeletal outline image of a house in white-enameled steel erected on the site of Benjamin Franklin's residence in Philadelphia (1972). The house is positioned over a plaza, which is inset with the first-floor plan of the house that archaeologists decided was once there. The "drawn" house in steel becomes the sign for the real building, which is an underground museum to Franklin's life in the city. This is located beneath the old floor plan, which paradoxically serves as part of its roof.

Upsetting the conventional image by slightly quirky interference reinforces the image by making the observer more aware of its shape. This occurs in the Franklin memorial where the gabled box, which all too prosaically says "house," is jolted out of its ordinariness by three box-like elements precariously astride the apex of the gable. These would be the only visible portions of the chimneys if the walls and roof actually closed the house. Irregularly shaped and placed because of the casual insertion of fireplaces into the plan, these functional birds, perched on the ridgepole, inflect the conceptual abstraction of the building toward the particular and everyday.

The Nantucket houses more elaborately display the effect of such quirkiness. A corner of one of the houses is lopped off at an oblique angle, making its opposite number more vivid as a "corner" and the conven-

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tional shape of the gabled rectangle more apparent. The front porches of the houses, stiffly and invitingly facing the ocean, would normally appear recessed from the plane of the side elevation, as appendages to the main bulk of the house. But here, where the wooden stripping which edges the side elevation would typically assume a rectangular shape, the boundary is abruptly pulled out to a visor-like beak, in order to make the roof of the porch. So the profile of the porch is drawn out of the side elevation. Within the bounding outline for the big shape there are other quirks. An overlarge pair of windows, which would be typically centered in its gable, slips off-center, so that one of its upper corners touches the outer edging, calling attention to its own shape and also pointing to, even pricking, the controlling boundary. Below this drifting pair a row of standard carpentered windows rigidly centered by a commonplace carpentered door creates a congested window band clear across the elevation—just like those in modern buildings. The band itself is only barely contained at its extremities by the edging strip. Through such literal engagement of the surrounding boundary by the elements it contains, the shapes of both are animated to visibility. But they are also made visible beyond mere shape; they appear so evidently as the displaced conventions of "window," "door," and "house" that they simultaneously exist as signs or ideas of themselves. They are physically *of* the building; but they are *off* it too, inhabiting the building's conceptual realm somewhere between the child's crayon drawing and the typological sign.

The ideographic resonance of such thin, flat architectural components contributes to their quality as signs, that is, as actual signboards. The exhibition shows that Venturi is as enamored of the "bill-ding board" approach today as he was at the start. It is another indication of his determination to work out his architectural destiny from the toughness of the art/pop dialectic which he and others posed for themselves in the Sixties, but which few other architects of his stature still pursue so relentlessly.

The immediacy of the signboard in Venturi's work can be upsetting in its audacity. For a recent unbuilt commission for a visitors center at an Army Corps of Engineers base (1978), Venturi meets the program very directly with a gray clapboarded, barracks-style building, its principal eccentricity being a roof that echoes the slight slope of its site like the brim of a fedora, one end flipped down, the other up. But the modest building provides a base for a towering signboard of the insignia of the Corps, which rises out of the roof as a flaming-red crenellated castle. For his designs of branch banks of suburban Connecticut in the early Seventies, Venturi abbreviated various classical elevations into signs of themselves, not only by flattening them but by collapsing (say) a four-columned portico and a row of windows into a two-columned, one-window motif reduction of itself. This reduction would be blown up to a rambunctious scale for the size of the building, so as to become a double sign, for both "Renaissance" and "monumentality." For another of these unbuilt branch banks, an equally modest box is swallowed in a bloated Wrenish cupola. It is a three-dimensional, stylized variant of its prototype, but a sign nonetheless, subtly stretched in one direction so as to pull its tower toward a signboard. In the first two instances sign becomes architecture, in the other architecture becomes sign.

What interests Venturi is not just the sign on the building, but the sign as it could become a building. In his designs the signboard front of the decorated shed often appears in architectural disguise. In three early houses at the very start of his career (only the last of which was built, for his mother, in Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania, in 1962) the source of inspiration is the same: namely, the very drawn-out spread of the gable of McKim, Mead & White's William Low house of 1886, a house that appears in Scully's *The Shingle Style*. A thin house with the gable set broadside to Narragansett Bay, the Low house served Venturi as a model for the traditional gable stretched into a signboard

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of itself. He used the gable in houses so thin from front to back that their sides virtually disappear from consciousness, making the allusion to signboard flatness the more apt. Moreover, in all three of these early designs, the gables—front and back—project as signboard planes above the box of space within, literally sandwiching the interior between front and rear elevations. Space as a layer is very common in current design, as Rosemarie Haag Bletter indicates in her perceptive introduction for the catalogue of the exhibition. Venturi is as responsible as anyone for making it so.

There are still subtler ways of wedding the signboard to the elevation. Consider the pleated front of the Guild House in Philadelphia (1960-63), an apartment house for the elderly. A central entrance block with a distinctive sign-like frontispiece at the sidewalk edge steps back to a second elevation, which extends slightly beyond the front elevation to either side, thus suggesting a second façade behind the first. The same stepping and spreading makes a third behind the second. WPA housing projects come to mind here, with their frequent stepped or cross-shaped or diagonal massing; but WPA houses were never this sort of relatively narrow, long box, nor did they include an attempt at picturesque geometrical massing squashed into tightly superimposed layers. Clearly Guild House also alludes to the telescoped overlap of Jasper Johns's *Three Flags,* which appears as one of the illustrations in *Complexity and Contradiction.*

Wu Hall at Princeton illustrates still a third possibility for the elevation as a disguised signboard. There the building occupies a thin, elongated lot which dictates its confinement as a layer of space. The principal elevation stretches along a walkway, and appears more as a very long side elevation than a front. Venturi binds the elevation together with "modern" ribbon windows; but back and forth projections and signs along the way convert the façade into a "street" of three buildings, each celebrating a major function of the hall. The principal entrance to the refectory, lounge, and game rooms is situated under a panel emblazoned (like Tudor door-heads) with suggestions of frames, strapwork, roundels, pediments, and obelisks. All appear as flat geometrical entities in gray marble, flush with their white marble background. After an inset in the wall, the administrative offices pop out in efficiency modern. Another inset, and the library pops out with a stylized Palladian window motif suggesting Adamesque design. This street of buildings within a single building, each with its sign, breaks up the institutional look of the whole into playful picturesqueness. But looked at another way, the street disappears, and--there it is!—the big, modern decorated shed.

Flat pattern ornament may preserve the essence of modernist concerns for flatness while countering traditional modernist plainness. Adolph Loos captivated the purist sensibilities of early modernism by inveighing against the "crime of ornament" perpetuated by the establishment reactionaries of his day. Modern artifacts were cleansed artifacts, as plain as they were planar. No longer of course. While Venturi has long used flat pattern ornament in his architecture (as early as the beginning of the Seventies), his interest in bolder, more complex, and more architectural ornamental treatments has increased. Certainly recent commissions for buildings in the Near East, even including a mosque (1983), have encouraged this concern. Beautiful drawings with surfaces decked out in stylized and simplified translations of the colorful interlaced patterning of Saracenic ornament indicate his sympathy for the tradition, in marked contrast to the chintzy disgrace brought to the region by most of the hoard of Western architects beckoned to Mecca by oil money. The front of the sizable decorated shed for the Institute for Scientific Information in Philadelphia (1978) is patterned as a graded checkerboard field of white and red brick, with touches of light blue, crimson, and gold. They change from blips of white and color at either end to a nearly full white field over the entrance. So the elevation derives its architectural definition from

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surface pattern alone. It orders the elevation as historical allusion might, but without its literalness, while reinforcing the sense of the wall as a thinly stretched modern surface.

At the opposite extreme to this geometrically determined field, huge, white, gold-centered Warhol-like posies, interspersed with occasional pears in crimson, float in blousy diagonals across the pale green walls of the decorated shed which houses the Best suburban shopping center in Oxford Valley, Pennsylvania (1977). Their cinematic, diagonal drift echoes the parallel alignment and movement of the cars in the parking lot. It is wildly exploded wallpaper patterning, but possessing an architectural scale. The wide lateral spacing of the crimson interruptions stretches the surface. Their vertical spacing is calculated to just miss the measure of its height, as the red pair emerging out of the ground responds to another disappearing off the edge at the roof.

In the Gropius Lecture, Venturi traced his progressive investigation of flatness in architecture as spatial layerings, the signboard, flat pattern ornament, and appliqué. By appliqué, he means the distribution of architectural elements over the surface of a wall, not as sculptured plastic elements—but as flat design flush with its surface—as in the marble panel over the entrance of Wu Hall. There is of course a distinguished tradition for such architecture: for example, the Cathedral and the Baptistry in Florence, or the cathedrals of Sienna and Pisa. Recent designs by Venturi derived from Greek temples show stylized porticoes set out in front of the wall of their "cella" on a parallel plane of their own. In his current design for the Seattle Art Museum, the architectural treatment of the wall is completely flush. Stylization of detail, bloating of profile, and subtle tricks in scaling mediate the appliqué between its architectural allusion and its actuality as a sign of this allusion.

In recent designs especially, the appliqué often comes off the wall as a plane with architectural cut-outs. This happens with the "portico" for the garden front (which really faces a wood) off a just completed house in Delaware. The portico is straight out of the Greek temple of Paestum. The burly swell of the entasis of the flattened "columns" is topped by the abrupt inverted curve of its "capital," which looks not unlike the inverted bowl of an Art Deco lighting fixture. The silhouetted portico supports an immense, wheel-like, semi-circular fan window. This bloated double sign for "monumentality" screens a low-gabled, cottage-like house. It ironically draws the cottage out of itself into the high realm of grand architecture.

Thus described, this kind of architecture may seem jokey, flimsy, and cynical. The worst fears of those who prophesied that no good would come from *Learning from Las Vegas* would seem to be justified. At the time of the book's publication, its critics took a number of negative stands against it. Some argued that worthwhile architectural theory had always been informed by high social aspirations, and could hardly be expected to emerge from the crassness—architecturally, socially, and morally—of Vegas. Others pointed out that, if the postmodernist generation criticized the uncritical enthusiasm of International Style modernists for technology, then the Venturi team was guilty of an equally uncritical enthusiasm for the trappings of commercial exploitation. Still others maintained that the Venturi emphasis on sign deliberately wrenched meaning from form, build, and function. The emphasis on two-dimensional graphics denied the ultimate reality of architecture as three-dimensional substance or volume. All these arguments—and more—have swirled around *Learning from Las Vegas,* and have been brought to bear against the architecture derived from its premises.

Yet the best of Venturi's work escapes the damnation. The explanation must begin with Venturi's seriousness about architecture, and the consummate rightness of his aesthetic decisions. Consider the example of the Paestum portico in Delaware. It is not cardboard scenery, but a structure of considerable thickness, so the lateral inflation of

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the columns suggests a wall. And the intensity of the shaping and proportion of the columns gives the voids between them an equally positive quality as shapes. One thinks back to the remark of one of Venturi's mentors, the architect Louis Kahn, who said of Paestum: "The walls parted, and the temple was born." And now, Venturi would seem to be saying: "The temple is flattened, and the wall returns."

Surely, too, the best of Venturi's architecture displays the taut balance he maintains among the three principal sources of influence that currently condition architectural design: modernism, historicism, and pop-vernacular. In his recent critical observations, Venturi is concerned to establish his centered position among these three sources of influence, and to indicate where he believes other architects have drifted off-center. But it is not influences that make architecture. It is the way in which influences are handled. There is an austerity about Venturi's work, a restraint, a finesse, that makes a little count for much. Or call it wit, which at its most incisive implies all of the above qualities plus a certain ironic detachment. This permits the deft use of allusion from different realms of borrowing. The distillation of these sources is something other than what they were.

Venturi's work gains in strength and possibilities as he steadily expands and perfects his resources. And if the decorated shed should fail him at some point in the future, the duck is also available.

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Jackson in the age of biography

by Fred Baumann

Political biographies are not what they once were. Often these days they are as indigestible as meticulous scholarship, uninspired by intellectual daring, can manage. There are not many of us, I suspect, who turn to them the way Harry Truman is said to have turned to Plutarch: in order to undertand a friend or enemy by learning to read his soul.

Robert V. Remini's biography of Andrew Jackson, now complete with a third volume, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy: 1833-1845,* seems to me a partial exception to this.[1] Remini's work is as fine as any the contemporary historical establishment can claim. It is fair-minded, colloquial, urbane, and up to the best standards of scholarship. What is more, Remini has a large point to make about Jackson and about American history. Certainly if any one recent work allows us to ask what keeps the best of our scholars from producing political biographies of the highest rank it is Remini's biography of Jackson. To answer that question, however, it is first necessary to see how Remini understands Jackson historically, and his own biography historiographically.

More than any other book, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s *The Age of Jackson* (1945) has helped to make Jackson a figure of enormous importance for us today, a figure perhaps even more important than Washington himself. Still, it is worth remembering that even in his own time Jackson was larger than life. He dwarfed every one of his presidential successors until Lincoln, and he achieved allegorical status in the minds of friend and foe alike. To some he looked like a refounder of the republic who, like the Athenian reformer Cleisthenes, took our political system toward direct and unfettered democracy. To others he seemed less benign. It was Jacksonian America, after all, that inspired Tocqueville's warnings about the dangers of "democratic despotism."

After the Civil War had eclipsed the comparatively petty quarrels of the 1820s and 1830s, what remained of Jackson's legend was largely the glamorous and exotic. Marquis James's two-volume biography (1933/1937) possessed, as Remini puts it, "all the color and excitement of one of the most dynamic" figures in American history. But it revealed only a "one-dimensional" Jackson, heroic and nationalistic, a figure without a darker side.

So it remained for Arthur Schlesinger to recall for us something of the ideological significance Jackson once had. He did this through a project whose goal was apparently the creation of an acceptable American genealogy for the New Deal. He attempted to assure us that Franklin Roosevelt was no

1 *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy: 1833-1845,* by Robert V. Remini. Harper & Row, 638 pages, $27.95. The first two volumes were *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire: 1767-1821* (1977) and *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom* (1981).

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wild innovator, that Roosevelt was only carrying on to the next logical stage the democratic movement Jackson had initiated. For Schlesinger, an "overhauled" liberal tradition was now presiding over the "final disappearance of Jeffersonian inhibitions," i.e., limited government. All that remained, apparently, was to make certain that the powers of "planning"—which are "wholesome and proper" in the hands of "a people's Government"—should not fall into "the hands of the political puppets of an economic autocracy." Implicit in Schlesinger's story was the idea that the dire warnings of tyranny coming from outraged Republicans during the New Deal were of no more account than the alarms sounded against Jackson by the Whigs a century earlier.

Schlesinger's success at making Jackson's mantle fit raiment for FDR was overwhelming. Still, there was dissent, most notably from Richard Hofstadter. In *The American Political Tradition* (1948), he discovered that Jackson was by no means an unambiguous democrat. On the contrary, the great plebeian was a supporter—and this really seemed to pain Hofstadter—of entrepreneurial capitalism. In the notorious Charles River Bridge case, for example, Jackson's appointees to the Supreme Court chose a definition of property rights that made life easier for entrepreneurs and harder for rentiers. Then, too, Jackson demanded "only the classic bourgeois ideal, equality before the law, restriction of government to equal protection of its citizens." For Hofstadter this idea of government amounted to merely the "philosophy of a rising middle class."

Such is the context in which Remini finds his argument. By the end of his third volume he has restored Schlesinger's case, if not in every detail. Thus, he fully accepts "Jackson's right to many of the claims advanced for him by the Progressive and New Deal historians. He was in fact a Man of the People . . . ."

This is obviously a debate among contemporary political liberals. As we shall see, it is this initial confinement of the question of Andrew Jackson that ultimately stands in the path of our historical understanding of him.

Jackson is at his colorful best in Remini's first volume, where he describes Jackson's early career in gaming, dueling, and Indian fighting. The Jackson that emerges here is a hero more through his gifts as a leader of men than as a military genius. We also find in this volume a convincing account of Jackson's extreme willfulness and temper, which were constantly at war with, but ultimately subdued by, his equally extreme sense of discipline and duty. We see Jackson tyrannizing the town of New Orleans when the War of 1812 had just ended because he has not received official confirmation of the peace everyone believes (correctly) to have been signed; he even sends an obstreperous judge to jail. But when the news of peace is confirmed, he hands over all power to the civilian authorities and accepts judicial punishment for contempt.

For Remini, however, the key to Jackson's career emerges in the biography's second volume, where Jackson enters upon his career as a "reformer." This career began out of Jackson's anger at the "corrupt bargain" that was struck between Henry Clay and John Quincy Adams in 1824 to "deprive" Jackson of the presidency. Because Jackson had won only a plurality of electoral and popular votes in that election, the outcome was decided in the House of Representatives, where Clay threw his support to Adams. Here Remini differs most clearly from Hofstadter, for whom Jackson came into office four years later on themes no more consequential than "militant nationalism and equal access to office." Remini's Jackson, having begun as a proud, self-righteous man inclined to see conspiracies where he was thwarted, discovered in the election of 1824 an emblem of the moral decay that threatened, in his view, the Founders' pristine republican vision. Thenceforth, according to Remini, Jackson identified moral virtue with the people and vice with the special interests—above all, the wealthy.

The second half of Remini's second volume and the first half of his third deal with

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Jackson the reforming president, perhaps the re-founding president. The issue that dominates this account is Jackson's war with the Bank of the United States, the issue which more than any other marked his presidency. Because the Bank's standing was reinsured by means of payments to senatorial lions like Daniel Webster, it became, for Jackson, the great symbol of the corruption created by wealth and influence. Jackson defined the issue morally, as democratic virtue against aristocratic vice. For Remini, this division helps us to answer other questions about Jackson's presidency. Did Jackson support the entrepreneur, the small business man? Yes, but this was simply to support democracy. Did he oppose the abolition of slavery? Yes, because he saw in abolitionism only a ploy by aristocrats to create dissent for the sake of their own nefarious designs.

For Remini, even Jackson's struggle against Nullification—the doctrine whereby states claimed the right to declare null and void certain federal laws (such as tariffs)—is said to show a new and radically democratic perspective. Jackson opposed Nullification because he thought it violated the supreme right of the national majority to coerce a "faction" in a state (even if it were a majority "faction"). According to Remini, Jackson's opposition showed "a grasp of political reality far beyond many of his contemporaries." "No longer," he tells us,

> did he subscribe to republicanism with its fear and hesitations about democracy, fears that allowed the legislature or some other agency such as the Electoral College to "refine" or alter the popular will when necessary. Jackson insisted on democratic rule. He symbolized it.

Here is the core of the claim for Jackson as the re-founder. Like Hofstadter, Remini recognizes that the democratization of American life was not so much created as confirmed by Jackson's presidency. But Jackson gets credit for daring to be in tune with the times. That he sometimes acted imperiously does not seem to subtract from his achievement. In the dispute over the Bank of the United States, for example, Jackson, who had begun his political career as a defender of limited government, became a ferocious advocate of executive power. He issued a veto on the Bank's re-charter, ignored a senatorial censure, quashed Congress's claim to a special relationship with the Secretary of the Treasury, and invested government funds in a number of "pet" state banks whose directors shared his principles. The Whigs cried foul to all this and warned of the dangers of Caesarism; here, they thought, was another self-serving military hero breaking down all constitutional restraints in demagogic support of the "poor," all the while disguising his true intentions with pious talk about "virtue."

Remini does not make any particular attempt to mitigate these accusations. He doesn't feel he has to; the more powerfully grounded they seem to be, the more powerfully the historical outcome is said to refute them. After all, Jackson gave way, not to Antony and Augustus, but to Martin Van Buren. Need more be said? What misled the Whigs, in Remini's view, was both their insufficient appreciation of the inevitability of democracy and their needless fear of it. "A revolution?" asks Remini. "Indeed—and bloodless, just as Clay described it." This suggests that there is nothing wrong with this revolution so long as it is bloodless, and that Clay himself was wrong for believing that it could tend toward despotism.

The story Remini tells is a good one, and even largely true. Still, there is an obvious problem. How could Jackson, who thought of himself as a limited-government, Jeffersonian republican, become the harbinger of what looks like intense, strong-government Hamiltonianism? Schlesinger championed Jackson because he thought that liberalism had to be overhauled at the time of the New Deal to rid it of Jeffersonian inhibitions. Remini seems to think that Jackson had already done that job. But Jackson plainly didn't think so.

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If we want to look for the reasons why Jackson was in fact no Caesar, we might look to his belief that he was defending the old republican constitution rather than—as Remini would have it—replacing it with a new "democratic" one. In short, we might take seriously Jackson's commitment to limited government rather than treating it as an immature phase of full democracy.

For example, Jackson looks like a self-contradictory demagogue when he removes government deposits from the Bank of the United States. He did so on the grounds that the Bank represented too great an accretion of undemocratic power, but then he awarded the money to state banks friendly to his political view. The important point, though, is that Jackson was aware of the contradiction and tried to resolve it. Rather than building on the power he had obtained and seeking to institutionalize it, he tried to regulate deposit banking precisely to keep it from being a weapon in the president's hand. Interestingly, he was blocked for years by the Whigs. Eventually they tied his banking reform to their scheme for redistributing federal revenue surplus to the states. (This scheme, by the way, is the genuine ancestor of the federal paternalism that regulates state speed limits and drinking laws by the threat of withholding road-building funds.)

But as Remini rightly remarks in this context: "The preservation of individual liberty had always been President Jackson's goal. He knew only one certain means to that end: the perpetuation of the minimal state." And, one might add, the perpetuation of those very republican barriers to direct and simple power that Remini thinks Jackson had in principle transcended. Hence, Jackson, who wanted the deposit banking reform that would *weaken* his hand, made difficulties about accepting it because it was tied to another innovation that would have *strengthened* his hand. Caesars don't usually act like this; neither do constitutional innovators.

It becomes equally hard to accept Remini's characterization of Jackson's response to Nullification as a break with republican-

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ism in the name of democracy. By Remini's own account it is clear that Jackson's commitment to states' rights never wavered. He simply believed, along with just about everybody else, including Daniel Webster, that Nullification was taking a good thing too far.

There is of course room for interpretation in these matters. And it is easy to find in Jackson's rhetoric extreme statements, made in the heat of political conflict, out of which one can confect the origins of a different political tradition. But as Leo Strauss said, it is one thing to dare extreme remarks within a tradition; it is quite another to intend them as the basis of something new. Someone like Jackson, who fundamentally accepted the restraints of the republican tradition, could bend that tradition at the edges with full confidence that it would stand the strain. Jackson is clearly a borderline case; that is partly why he is so interesting. One can plausibly see him the way Remini does, as part of the grand egalitarian sweep of modern history. But one can also see him as someone who saved us from the consequences of an unlimited democratic egalitarianism precisely because of his adherence to the self-denying limitations on power that characterized our republican founding.

Though one may disagree about where to put Jackson on the map of political taxonomy, it is important to notice how the pocket-Hegelianism of historians like Schlesinger and Remini gets in the way of direct confrontation with the problem of understanding Jackson's case. For if we know in advance that Jackson's republicanism was already an anachronism that he was outgrowing, if we know that what is important about him is the extent to which he foreshadowed Franklin Roosevelt, we find it extraordinarily difficult to see the world as Jackson saw it, to take seriously both him and his opponents, and hence to learn from their experiences something that may be of use to us. If we could only stop transcending Jackson for a moment, he might be able to transcend us.

One major defect in Remini's attempt to refurbish the pleasant myth of an effortlessly burgeoning democracy is the way it obscures Jackson's statesmanship. An obvious example is Jackson's treatment of South Carolina's threat to secede from the Union on the basis of its claimed right to nullify federal law. If we compare this threat to the one that faced Lincoln thirty years later, we see that Jackson possessed enormous advantages: he commanded overwhelming military force; slavery was not an issue and tempers had not been exasperated for thirty years; South Carolina was acting alone; and Jackson had the nimbus of a military hero (and a Southern one at that). Still, his success was not a foregone conclusion. And even success won by force of arms might have been judged a failure had it festered afterwards the way Reconstruction later did.

To win, Jackson adopted a double strategy. While he compromised on the tariff that Calhoun felt violated South Carolina's rights, he insisted on a Force Bill. It threatened the nullifiers with "such a force as will overaw [Remini retains Jackson's misspellings] resistance, put treason and rebellion down without blood, and arrest and hand over to the judiciary for trial and punishment the leaders, exciters and prompters of this rebellion and treason."

The tariff compromise looked good in South Carolina and Jackson's commitment to force was ominously credible. Rumors began to spread that Henry Clay, Jackson's Kentucky rival, would cut a deal with Calhoun. This would enable Calhoun to back down while still claiming victory, and make Clay look like the peacemaker. Jackson thus faced a tactical choice. Should he continue to push the Force Bill through Congress or should he simply allow Calhoun to back down? There was much to say for both positions, especially after the Clay-Calhoun deal was struck and a tariff was proposed that was actually *worse* for Southern interests than the one Jackson had proposed. On behalf of Jackson's pursuing the Force Bill, one could argue that a fundamental challenge to the legitimacy and permanence of the Union had been offered, and that it

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could not be met ambiguously. Against it, one could argue that to press matters after a compromise had been reached was to risk being seen as needlessly vindictive, even provocative. This was a classic statesman's choice, one where reasonable arguments can be made for opposing choices, where decisions have to be made according to general principles and a shrewd assessment of the particular characters of allies and opponents. Van Buren, as might be expected, argued for moderation; Jackson chose the hard line.

All this is implicit in Remini's account, but it is not evident in his conclusions. He attributes Van Buren's position to political ambition, to the fear of antagonizing potential Southern support, "lest he stumble into a situation that could jeopardize his future presidential aspirations." Jackson, however, is given credit for putting the Union above the interests of party (after all, one might muse cynically, he already *was* president, so it was easier for him than for Van Buren). "In his mind the only question was saving the Union, and on that there could be no ambiguity or difference of opinion." Thus, where we might have heard about the choices facing statesmen, we get a banal civics lesson.

By making Jackson its hero, Remini paradoxically deprives him of the credit he is properly due. For Jackson saw, I think rightly, that this was no ordinary political confrontation to be settled under the usual, half-friendly code; this was a threat to the political order itself and needed signal retribution. Jackson had to know that he was running the risk of exacerbating a bad situation just as it was coming under control, that he might be condemned by future historians, with their easy omniscience, as a willful, bellicose blunderer. Van Buren had a good case, and Remini's failure to acknowledge it only conceals from the reader the difficulty Jackson faced, and the courage of his choice.

Of course, Remini does not always praise Jackson. He allots him "a full measure of blame" for the subsequent "disaster" of the Clay-Calhoun tariff. According to Remini, Jackson neglected the management of the tariff compromise because he was so "preoccupied with winning passage of the Force Bill that he let everything else, including the tariff, go by the board." But the Force Bill was crucial: if it passed, it would be clear that Nullification had been decisively beaten; in this sense, the tariff counted hardly at all. Here, curiously, Remini, who had previously criticized Van Buren for taking the short and partisan view in the interests of his political aspirations, now adopts it against Jackson. Why? I believe it is because he does not see the problems of statecraft as statesmen must see them. Instead, he substitutes the pieties of the textbook, where all virtues are equally required and where the hero not only shows himself to be brave but also keeps his desk clean.

Thus what separates this biography from the very best—and what separates a great deal of contemporary political biography from models of the kind—is the neglect of politics. Instead of politics, with its blinding fogs, moral quicksands, and, worst of all, its well-paved and plausibly beckoning paths to disaster, we have a story about the ever broadening, sure-flowing, democratic river which leads the trusting and pure at heart ever safe to port.

What we look for in political biography is an entry into a world we know of but do not know ourselves, the world of fateful political choices made largely in ignorance. To Remini's credit, the materials for such a biography of Jackson are now readily at hand. These materials could provide a more serious account of Jackson's choices in the Nullification crisis, and a less blithe weighing of the merits and demerits of his confrontation with the Bank. They could allow too for an account of anti-abolitionism that goes beyond determining Jackson's democratic bona fides, and an account of Jackson the democrat and Jackson the Man of Destiny that holds him to the highest standards of political statesmanship as embodied in, say, the Founders and Abraham Lincoln.

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I think that the indifference to politics which mars Remini's biography and others is in fact closely related to liberalism. For liberalism began precisely in denying the naturalness of politics; it relegated politics to a kind of mechanical art that would allow most of us to be free of it and thus free to pursue our private ends—which are, presumably, peace and comfort above all else.[2] Still, in the classical liberalism of Locke and the Founders, any devaluation of the political was a matter of conscious choice. It took place in the context of a lively appreciation of the importance of those mechanical workers—rulers, soldiers, and lawmakers—who preserve the anti-political political order. Moreover, the Founders knew that there are alternative pleasures to peace and comfort, namely power and glory, and that these are likely to attract at least some men, perhaps those most like themselves. Hence the Founders fashioned a republicanism wherein ambition was made to counteract ambition: hence their seriousness about politics.

When that seriousness is lost, when the ambitious lose their ambition (as John Stuart Mill and Tocqueville feared), when those who prefer peace and comfort forget the necessary precondition of their existence, politics disappears altogether. These days the strange structure whereby power was tamed and turned against itself appears timid and inefficient. For politics—and therefore statesmanship—is misconceived today as administration, its beneficence assumed, its efficiency idealized. The current liberal impatience with republicanism derives from this change in perception, as does the uncritical praise for a quasi-plebiscitary "democracy" as the ultimate criterion for everything else.

The Whigs were wrong about Jackson; he was not a tyrant. But whether Tocqueville was wrong to fear "democratic despotism" is another question, for his description of where we seemed to be tending does not require a despot to be true. Rather, simple passivity and a too thoughtless enjoyment of the delights of democracy might bring into being a state that merely keeps us happy, a public attitude that merely keeps us orderly, and a daily life that merely keeps us busy. It seems to me still an open question whether the democratic tendencies Tocqueville observed and Remini emphasizes may not be leading in that direction.

I am thoroughly persuaded by Remini that Jackson, in his self-righteous anger and pride, said a lot of things that, taken seriously, could only be harmful to the republican traditions from which he sprang. His apparent belief that the people were the sole repository of virtue (after all, they voted for him), his partisan incapacity to believe that anyone might disagree with him out of anything but the basest motives, his impatience with any institutional obstacles to the fullest exercise of his will—all this led him occasionally to postures that were worthy of any ordinary demagogue in history. Furthermore, since he did conspire to further his reputation as the great Savior-Democrat, I think he was in fact responsible for some of the forgetfulness about the political character of his regime. In that sense, Remini really does have something to celebrate in Jackson—as the re-founder of a more democratic America. The joke though is that this re-founding is actually more of a *forgetting* of the foundations of American government than a re-founding. Moreover, Jackson did what he did because he was utterly convinced that he labored in the constitutional republican sense. To that extent he was responsible for the democratic myth and for the education of those historians who can no longer understand him. Remini's biography offers us as good an access to Jackson on his own terms as we are likely to get soon. But its achievement should not conceal from us that it falls short of the highest standards of political biography. Nor should we fail to remember why.

2 The devaluation of the political is precisely what Henry Kissinger has spent his career trying to overcome in the area of foreign policy, where it expresses itself as a dogmatic resolve to treat everything as an exception to the supposed rule of peace and international concord.

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Literary modern?

Michael H. Levenson A Genealogy of Modernism: English Literary Doctrine 1908-22. Cambridge University Press, 260 pages, $29.95

reviewed by René Wellek

It was right to call this excellent study *A Genealogy of Modernism,* since one could trace the ancestry of modernist doctrines almost indefinitely into the past. It was wrong to refer to "modernism" and not "a modernism," since the book ignores the many modernist or avant-garde movements all over the Western literary scene from South America to Russia. Actually the subtitle "A Study of English Literary Doctrine, 1902-1922," describes the book's contents accurately, though not exhaustively. Only a few authors are discussed in any detail: T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, Ford Madox Ford, Wyndham Lewis, and T.S. Eliot, all within the strict time limits of 1908-1922.

The term "modernism" was never used by this group to designate itself. It was imposed much later by hindsight. Robert Graves (in the *Times Literary Supplement,* October 1, 1954) could write "Pound-Eliot modernism of the twenties is already as dated as a stream-lined pogo-stick with decorative motifs from Tutankhamen's tomb." And in 1960 Harry Levin published a lecture entitled "What *was* Modernism?" (reprinted in *Refractions,* 1968). Even the variant "modernist" was not used by these writers at that time. There was a short-lived magazine called *The Modernist: A Monthly Magazine of Modern Arts and Letters* in *1919,* which reprinted articles by G.B. Shaw, Theodore Dreiser, Hart Crane, and Georges Duhamel in the first issue, but it mainly propagated the Russian Revolution. In 1927 Robert Graves and Laura Riding published *A Survey of Modernist Poetry,* which uses the term in a very inclusive manner: they discussed G.M. Hopkins from the past, and in particular T.S. Eliot, E.E. Cummings, the Sitwells, Siegfried Sassoon, and many other English and American poets.

"Modernism," "modernist," and "modern" all come from the Latin *modo,* meaning "today." These words have been used by anyone who felt that he was bringing or wanting something up-to-date or who disapproved of anything new, such as neologisms in language or new-fangled fashions in clothes. *The Oxford English Dictionary* gives examples, some going back to the late sixteenth century. There were polemics between *antiqui* and *moderni* in thirteenth-century scholasticism. All French literary histories tell of the "Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes" in the late seventeenth century. In England a similar debate instigated *The Battle of the Books,* in which Jonathan Swift played a part as a partisan of the Ancients. One can argue that the "classical-romantic" distinction of the brothers Schlegel (which was preceded by Schiller's "sentimental—naïve") is a restatement of this debate. In 1863 Baudelaire celebrated modernity, "the ephemeral and fleeting beauty of modern life." In Germany, around 1887, a variant form, "Die Moderne," was used as a slogan by writers whom we would today have to characterize as naturalists. In Spanish, the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío used the term "modernismo" since 1888. It has become firmly established for such diverse authors as Unamuno, Valle Inclán, Azorín, and many others who from the point of view of Eliot or Joyce belong to an earlier age. In addition, there was the widely noted movement of "modernism" in Roman Catholic theology, which was suppressed by an encyclical of Pope Pius X in 1907. An Englishman, George Tyrrell, was a prominent exponent. The Baron Friedrich von Hügel (1852-1925), who lived most of his life in England, interested Eliot greatly. Eliot reviewed a collection of his letters for *The Dial* (February, 1928) under the heading "An Emotional Unity" and discussed there Hügel's relation to modernism and modernism itself. Eliot concludes that Hügel, "though not modernist, belongs to the period of Modernism." I can only guess that Eliot avoided the term in literary contexts since

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he was aware of its use in Roman Catholic theology and conscious of the danger of confusion.

I have sketched quite incompletely the history of this term "modernism" in order to show that it is practically meaningless in itself. Mr. Levenson's careful, persuasive study of the authors he examines seems to me flawed by his obsession with the term, which he treats as if it were a definite entity. He almost personifies it when he declares that "modernism" "surpassed its origins" and that "after its Impressionist, Imagist and Vorticist avatars modernism returns to classicism." Throughout the book, Mr. Levenson assumes that there is such a thing as "modernism" hovering above the actual doctrines he quotes and analyzes. He speaks of a "general situation of early modernism" in 1897 and of a "developed modernist programme." He calls T. E. Hulme a "forerunner of modernism." Eliot, who is said to "exemplify English modernism," he sees as revising a "habit of the modernist mind," leading "modernism back towards a *rapprochement* with England, Europe and their traditions," and finally reorienting "the definition of modernism." But modernism was not defined or redefined by Eliot. In the Fifties it became a literary term. Along with the paradoxical word "postmodernism" (what is after today?) and "contemporaneous," it has assumed a definite meaning in English literary discussions. Joyce and Eliot now belong to modernism, Beckett to postmodernism; writers like the Angry Young Men are merely contemporaneous.

One should recognize that Mr. Levenson gives a well-documented, carefully dated exposition of the pronouncements of T. E. Hulme, the early Pound, and the early Eliot, with some glances at Ford Madox Ford and Wyndham Lewis. The exposition of the shifts in Hulme's views is particularly illuminating. Hulme began by expounding "Imagism," an anti-traditional, individualistic, intuitive creed buttressed by his study of Bergson. He then converted to classicism, the anti-romantic, reactionary creed of the *Action française,* and finally, under the influence of Worringer's *Abstraktion und Einfühlung,* he defended the abstract and even Cubist art of Jacob Epstein, Wyndham Lewis, and David Bomberg.

Mr. Levenson expounds the philosophical justifications that Hulme adduced and traces the sources of his views; but, though he acknowledges Hulme's lack of originality, he does not quite see that Hulme was a young man who merely translated, paraphrased, and even plagiarized foreign authors. Levenson ignores, for instance, the devastating evidence of his unscrupulous use of Dilthey and Scheler (see Jan J. Kamerbeek in *Contemporary Literature* 5 [1969]). As Hulme's first entirely sympathetic biographer, Michael Roberts, admitted: "there is scarcely a single statement in Hulme that is not borrowed." In his lifetime he supplied at most the slogan "Imagism" (and even this was denied to him by Ezra Pound, who called the claim "bullshit") and published five little descriptive poems under the ironic title "Complete Poetical Works" in 1912. The articles that could be called literary criticism were almost all published in a posthumous collection entitled *Speculations,* which was edited by Herbert Read in 1924 and hailed by Eliot as confirmation of his own critical creed, at which he had arrived independently or with the help of the same models. Eliot had never met Hulme (as Eliot stated in a letter to Samuel Hynes, 1934). Although he knew his poems, a translation from Bergson, and possibly some articles on philosophical topics, Eliot could not have known his literary criticism, which had remained unpublished.

Hulme's one widely quoted and anthologized essay, "Romanticism and Classicism," which Mr. Levenson dates at late 1911 or 1912, cannot withstand inspection. There Hulme identifies romanticism with optimism, liberalism, and a belief in progress, just the theories most of the great romantic poets detested. The Schlegels could not have endorsed this view, nor any other German romantic, nor Leopardi, Chateaubriand, or Vigny, nor Wordsworth or Coleridge after their first youth. It fits at most Rousseau,

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Victor Hugo, and Shelley. Hulme calls romanticism "spilt religion" and opposes it to classicism, which is said to recognize original sin (or at least the limitations of human nature) and the impossibility of progress. Hulme claims to root his ideas here in the Coleridgean distinction of imagination and fancy, but he actually fastens on Ruskin's later revision of the terms in order to disparage imagination as a solemn yearning for the vague and infinite and to commend fancy as preoccupied with the finite. Fanciful poetry will be dry and hard. It will use concrete language to make us see physical things. An astonishing attempt is made to recruit Coleridge and Bergson into the camp of "classicism." Classical art is somehow vital, intuitive, organic. Coleridge is stripped of his idealist metaphysics and Bergson is reconciled with the anti-romanticism of Lasserre and Maurras. This is an impossible task that only shows the confusions in Hulme's mind.

I cannot quite share Croce's view that manifestos, proclamations, and programs are "the most miserable manifestations of literary life" since it does not matter "what a poet wants to do or believes he will do but only what he does." Still, Hulme's, Pound's, and Lewis's programs belong not to a history of literary criticism but to a history of literary coteries. Pound invented "Vorticism," a slogan that left hardly any trace after the two single numbers of Lewis's *Blast.* Vortex, a word apparently derived from Descartes, simply meant dynamism, movement added to the image. Neither Hulme nor Pound nor Wyndham Lewis can be considered critics in the years to which Mr. Levenson limits himself. Only Eliot emerges as a real critic, but Mr. Levenson discusses his criticism only incidentally, pleading that others have done so, and switches then in his last chapter to a study of Eliot's *Waste Land.*

Mr. Levenson does not try to add to the many commentaries on *The Waste Land,* but discusses well the composition of the poem and its underlying assumptions: the lack of a "single consciousness" and "the dissolution of the boundaries around the self." He also writes on the influence of F. H. Bradley, which has been either grossly exaggerated or dismissed. He shows that Eliot accepted Bradley's "undermining of the self" and developed a theory of a plurality of consciousness, of points of view, of multiple perspectives that produce meaning. This fits in with Eliot's concern with anthropology, with primitive ritual, with Oriental religions, and with the mythic method he praised in *Ulysses* as an alternative to narrative. Mr. Levenson sees the divergence between Eliot's criticism and his poetry. In his criticism, Eliot reasserted the centrality of the European tradition, reappraised the Jacobean dramatists, the Metaphysicals, and Dryden. As I argued long ago in an essay on Eliot's criticism in the *Sewanee Review* (1956), there is a blatant contradiction between Eliot's proclaimed classicism—which is purely ideological and derived from Babbitt, Lasserre, Maurras, and Benda (and later confirmed by Hulme's *Speculations*)—and his taste for poetry: for Dante, the late Shakespeare, the Jacobean dramatists, some of the Metaphysicals, Dryden, and the French Symbolists. The concern for the irrational and primitive, though animating *The Waste Land* and much later poetry, is pushed aside in Eliot's criticism. Mr. Levenson sees this, but ignores the fact that Eliot's specific synthesis cannot be called a stage in the development of modernism. At that time, Eliot's position was hardly understood and even less accepted. *The Criterion* had at its peak seven hundred and fifty subscribers. Mr. Levenson himself points out that Pound professed lack of interest in Eliot's criticism and that Eliot could say, in 1928, "We can now see that there was no movement, no revolution, and there is no formula." Imagism and Vorticism were ephemeral slogans. Pound later pontificated in the *ABC of Reading* (1934), but only Eliot developed a critical system and it proved immensely influential for I. A. Richards, Leavis, Empson, and the American New Critics. There was no modernist criticism in the time Mr. Levenson has studied so carefully. Only Eliot emerged as a great critic.

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Apologia pro arte sua

Kenneth Koch Selected Poems 1950-1982. Random House, 249 pages, $17.95

reviewed by Tom Disch

Among the diminishing numbers of those who continue to read poetry after obligatory undergraduate bouts with the Norton Anthology, there has been a generally accepted sense that the object of poetry is perfect candor and its subject is the self. Poets in this view are expected to find their voices, a task equated with achieving personal authenticity, a one-to-one parity between the "I" or eye of the poet's poems and who he *is*. This consensus view is wide enough to include as many varieties of poetry as there are personas available for authentification, but it excludes a great deal of poetry in which the poet is either not personally present or, more problematically, is present in a playful, parodic, or otherwise "inauthentic" way.

For every consensus there is an opposite, if necessarily unequal, dissensus, and one of the most distinctive of dissenting anti-voices in contemporary poetry for the past thirty years has been Kenneth Koch. By the same dialectical logic that has made Allen Ginsberg a celebrity of the establishment he inveighs against, Koch has become the founding father of, and chief spokesman for, the one branch of the poetry business to prosper during the industry's years of decline—the business of teaching poetry. Teaching, that is, not the rigors and rigidities of the consensus style to academic apprentices, but rather instructing various captive audiences of the welfare state (schoolchildren, nursing home residents) in a more handicraft-like poetry whose organizing principle is Fun.

Koch's poetry may be a game everyone can play, but that is not to say it can't be played at various levels of skill. Indeed, if Fun is to be its measure, then no one's poetry is more successful than Koch's, for he is the funniest poet we've got. And yet, because he has sedulously avoided the jinglier forms of "light verse," he can't be dismissed as middlebrow or merely clever. Indeed, he is singularly secure against criticism, having devoted a significant portion of his poetry—as much as a third of these *Selected Poems*—to an *apologia pro arte sua,* poems in which he presents a moving target as hypnotically evasive, in its way, as that of his friend and co-conspirator John Ashbery. Consider, in this passage from "Days and Nights" (the title poem of a recent [1982] collection, and one of many that are, ostensibly, essays in self-criticism), the flair with which he keeps changing the subject and staying that crucial conversational beat ahead of us, the readers (of whose existence and needs Koch is, for a poet, uncommonly aware):

> O wonderful silence of animals
> It's among you that I best perhaps could write!
> Yet one needs readers. Also other people to
> talk to
> To be friends with and to love. To go about
> with. And
> This takes time. And people making noise,
> Talking, and playing the piano, and always
> running around.
>
> Night falls on my desk. It's an unusual
> situation.
> Usually I have stopped work by now. But this
> time I'm in the midst of a thrilling evasion,
> Something I promised I wouldn't do—
> sneaking in a short poem
> In the midst of my long one. Meanwhile
> you're patient, and the veal's cold.
>
> Fresh spring evening breezes over the plates
> We finish eating from and then go out.
> Personal life is everything personal life is
> nothing
> Sometimes—click—one just feels isolated
> from personal life
> Of coure it's not public life I'm comparing it
> to, that's nonsense vanity—
> So what's personal life?

Who could disagree with such sententiae, or fail to be delighted by the swerves from

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thudding obviousness to lyrical inconsequence with then a characteristic rebound to Koch's own accommodation to the poetry of the consensus, a version of the domestic sublime that is deflated and accident-prone but still full of the will to be thrilling in the grand remembered manner of True Confessions; and then, just as characteristically, the "personal" details become the occasion for turning the spotlight on the theory generating the details: "So what's personal life?"

Since Koch so ably sets forth the terms on which we are supposed to appreciate him, let me dispense with paraphrase and quote a key passage from "The Art of Poetry," his most exhaustive statement on the subject and a poem that should be anthologized forever, right besides Pope's:

> . . . Just how good a poem should be
> Before one releases it, either from one's own
> work or then into the purview of others,
> May be decided by applying the following
> rules: ask 1) Is it astonishing?
> Am I pleased each time I read it? Does it say
> something I was unaware of
> Before I sat down to write it? and 2) Do I
> stand up from it a better man
> Or a wiser, or both? or can the two not be
> separated? 3) Is it really by me
> Or have I stolen it from somewhere else?
> (This sometimes happens,
> Though it is comparatively rare.) 4) Does
> it reveal something about me
> I never want anyone to know? 5) Is it
> sufficiently "modern"?
> (More about this a little later) 6) Is it in my
> own "voice"?
> Along with, of course, the more obvious
> questions, such as
> 7) Is there any unwanted awkwardness, cheap
> effects, asking illegitimately for attention,
> Show-offness, cuteness, pseudo-profundity,
> old hat checks,
> Unassimilated dream fragments, or other
> "literary," "kiss-me-I'm-poetical" junk?
> Is my poem free of this? 8) Does it flow
> smoothly and swiftly
> From excitement to dream and then come
> flooding reason
> With purity and soundness and joy?
> 9) Is this the kind of poem
> I would envy in another if he could write? 10)
> Would I be happy to go to Heaven with this
> pinned on my
> Angelic jacket as an entrance show? Oh, would
> I? And if you can answer to all these Yes
> Except for the 4th one, to which the answer
> should be No,
> Then you can release it, at least for the time
> being.
> I would look at it again, though, perhaps in
> two hours, then after one or two weeks,
> And then a month later, at which time you can
> probably be sure.

Now these criteria, for all their Polonian assurance, can't really be said to be Koch's, but rather are those of a hypothetical "exigent poet," whose response to the secret "quota system" of poetry (the system that's been put in place to keep the universe from being flooded with poetry at the awful rate of ten thousand poems per annum per person) is "If I can write one good poem a year I am grateful." With such exigence Koch actually has little sympathy, and so all his counsels of perfection must be understood not as a loping and slightly loopy but *sincere* didacticism but as a grotesque impersonation of a comic character, one who, as comedy demands, is incapable of following his own rules, for what could be more "kiss-me-I'm poetical" than the stricture that comes immediately after that prohibition, that a poem should come "flooding reason/With purity and soundness and joy?"

This displacement of the poet's "voice" to somewhere always outside his own personality derives from a sense that the mind is a slippery thing and, like the children Koch has taught, a natural surrealist that can suppose a blue rose as readily as a red and that can only to its own self be true if it is free to deal in oxymorons. This programmatic need for quicksilver disjunctions has led Koch to some of the most pulverized poetry in the English language, and though the principle of selection for these *Selected Poems* de-emphasizes the overt surrealism, and elimi-

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nates entirely work done in the vein of his infamously unreadable 2,400-lines-long *When the Sun Tries to Go On,*[1] enough slippage remains, even in his discursive poems, to make a proofreader's life hell.

Almost to a poem Koch's selection corresponds to my own preferences, eliminating only some twenty percent of the material from his two meatiest collections *Thank You* (1962) and *The Art of Love* (1975) and halving the bulk of his three other collections. He does not include excerpts from his two Ariosto-cum-Disney-inspired epics, *Ko* (1959) and *The Duplications* (1977), nor any of the playlets from the collection *Bertha*, and these omissions do a disservice to his oeuvre that time and the decorums of reputation will have to remedy with a *Complete Works.* Meanwhile, this volume is *crême fraiche* and serves the essential purpose of canon fodder for those libraries, public and private, that have Koch-sized gaps between Kipling and Lowell.

Its appearance does, however, pose the question, which Koch himself keeps playing with like a sore tooth, of whether his genius has suffered a decline since the dazzlement of the poems in *Thank You* and its perceived renaissance in *The Art of Love.* "Is there some way," he worries,

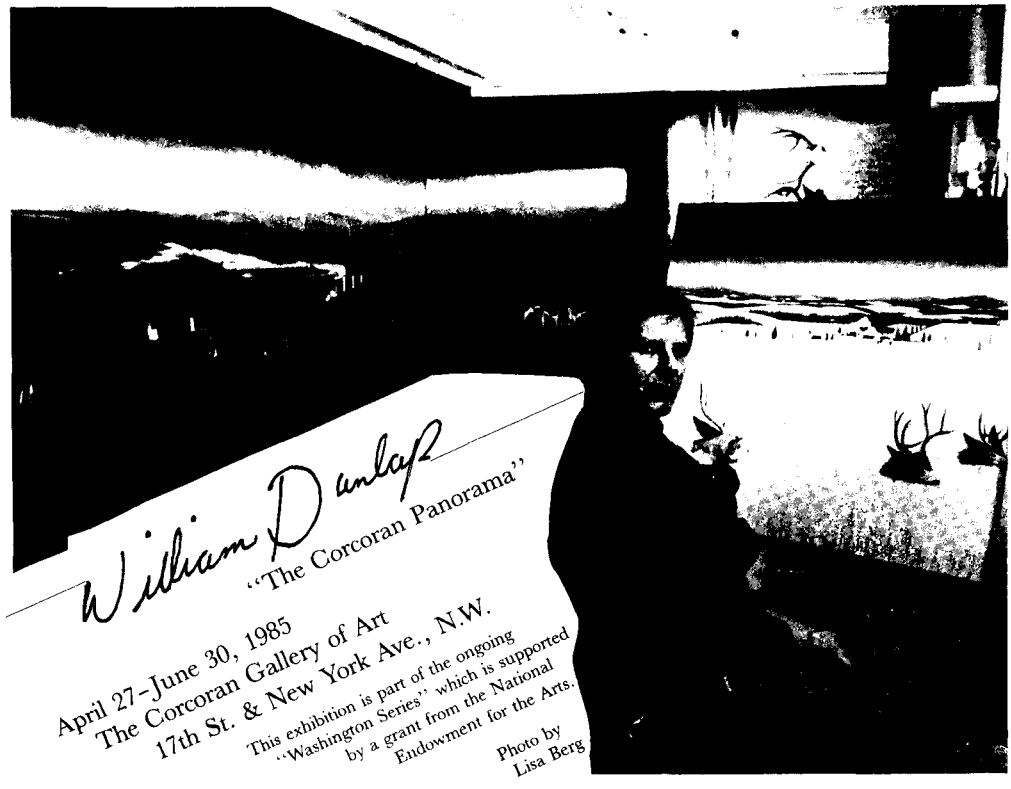
> . . . to ride to old age and to fame and acceptance
> And pride in oneself and the knowledge society approves one
> Without getting lousier and lousier and depleted of talent? . . .

And again, also from "The Art of Poetry":

> . . . This fear [that one has "lost one's talent"]
> Is a perfectly logical fear for poets to have,
> And all of them, from time to time, have it.

1 Whence this representative sampling:

> Scenic parachute. Column. Pear. Elevator
> Sent hair swans. Bam the students. Pillow
> Then Swedish underwear. Year-horse. Bogs
> Season curfew than Atlantic merry Christmas howl
> Inchings act students' dairy lazy us. Pegs!


William Dunlap
"The Corcoran Panorama"
April 27–June 30, 1985
The Corcoran Gallery of Art
17th St. & New York Ave., N.W.
This exhibition is part of the ongoing "Washington Series" which is supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.
Photo by Lisa Berg

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It is very rare
For what one does best and that on which
one's happiness depends
To so large an extent, to be itself dependent
on factors
Seemingly beyond one's control. For whence
cometh Inspiration?
Will she stay in her Bower of Bliss or come to
me this evening?
Have I gotten too old for her kisses? Will she
like that boy there rather than me?
Am I a dried-up old hog? Is this then the end
of it? Haven't I
Lost that sweet easy knack I had last week,
Last month, last year, last decade, which
pleased everyone
And especially pleased me? I no longer can
feel the warmth of it—
Oh, I have indeed lost it? Etcetera . . . .

His answer, in the first instance, is "Yes, Yeats showed it could be./And Sophocles wrote poetry until he was a hundred and one . . ." and in the second instance that "one does not lose one's talent,/Although one can misplace it." But this does beg the question, which he raises earlier, of what went wrong with Wordsworth and Whitman that made their revisions of their early work "almost always terrible." He, however, needn't be so worried. Inspiration is surely still a regular visitor *chez* Koch, but she does come these days, as our old friends are wont, in clothes we've seen her in before. *The Duplications* duplicated, without improving, both the rhyme scheme and cartooning style of *Ko,* and many of the poems in the last two collections slip into sounding like the imitations of his own epigones, who have taken up Koch's campy tone and cartoon scenery strictly *pour épater* (and because it is so imitable).

When Koch, in the Fifties, began a poem "You were wearing your Edgar Allan Poe printed cotton blouse/In each divided up square of the blouse was a picture of Edgar Allan Poe . . ." he was being as prophetic of the coming triumphs of Consumerism as any Andy Warhol can of soup. But in many of the poems of the late Seventies he slips into his earlier persona of the Inspired Maunderer—and then just maunders.

Yet these are venial sins, even in a *Selected Poems,* for the worst that can be said of Koch is that he is, like Picasso or Handel or Gertrude Stein, his own best imitator. As for Koch at his best he is simply too large and various in his accomplishment to be accounted for in the space of a review. For all his scorn of the "exigent poet," Koch's ratio of original invention to canny rescension is respectably high, and there is no poet of our time who has lived up so consistently to his own exigent demands. I quote a last time from "The Art of Poetry":

. . . Remember your obligation is to write,
And, in writing, to be serious without being
solemn, fresh without being cold,
To be inclusive without being asinine,
particular
Without being picky, feminine without being
effeminate,
Masculine without being brutish, human
while keeping all the animal graces
You had inside the womb, and beast-like
without being inhuman.
Let your language be delectable always, and
fresh and true.
Don't be conceited. Let your compassion
guide you
And your excitement. And always bring your
endeavors to their end.

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Notebook

"My dear blest Percy!"

by Louis Auchincloss

Percy Lubbock (1878-1965) had the perfect training, background, and intellectual equipment to become a major novelist of his time. Well-to-do, well-connected, a graduate of Eton and King's College, Cambridge, he had addressed himself early to the literary life, not only as a student and scholar but as a cultivator of older literary luminaries. While still a young man he became the intimate friend of Arthur Christopher Benson, Howard Sturgis, Henry James, and Edith Wharton. He would ultimately edit Benson's voluminous diaries and the letters and fiction of James, who apostrophized him in a letter as "my dear blest Percy!"

He not only started surely; he proceeded with care. His first book was a life in letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning; his second, a short biography of Pepys, of whose library in Magdalen College, Cambridge, he was for a time director. It was not until 1921 that he published *The Craft of Fiction* and made a name for himself by drawing up the "principia" of the modern novel and proclaiming James as its master practitioner. In the latter's late style he saw the perfect union of form and matter:

> The well-made book is the book in which the subject and the form coincide and are indistinguishable—the book in which the matter is all used up in the form, in which the form expresses all the matter. Where there is disagreement and conflict between the two, there is stuff that is superfluous or there is stuff that is wanting; the form of the book, as it stands before us, has failed to do justice to the idea.

From now on Lubbock's creative pace accelerated. The next year saw the appearance of *Earlham,* his nostalgic description of the ancestral Norfolk seat of his mother's family, the Gurneys. England's stately homes have been often and lovingly depicted in lacquered prose, but Lubbock's evocation of this ancient mansion, red and mellow, spacious, sunbathed, with gables of flint and brick and high-sashed windows, is perhaps the finest of all. George Lyttleton, writing to Rupert Hart-Davis in 1957, inquired: "Who was the good man I met recently who shared my opinion of *Earlham,* i.e., as a book of almost unique beauty? It is about the only thing of importance I am quite sure of."

Lubbock knew just what he was doing in *Earlham*; had he allowed it to become fiction, it would have been nothing. The reproduction of settings and personalities in luminous prose was to become his peculiar accomplishment, and he understood that in so doing he had to be accurate or lost:

> In telling an imaginary story a writer is content to leave the reader in his error. The reader imagines the house, the room, the garden, as he pleases; what matter if it is all distorted, rearranged, so long as certain few details are correctly placed? An old-fashioned room, a window-seat, some high-backed chairs, some portraits on the panelled walls—enough, there

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> is a setting for the blush-tinted maiden who gazes from the window, a letter just falling from her hand. So the story might begin, and the author would contentedly leave you to fill in the picture of the room as you choose—with a thousand points of unlikeness to the room as he thought of it. But in a true story, like mine, everything seems to be spoilt if you deviate from my memory at any point—if you place, for example, the wrong kind of Chinese cups and beakers on the cabinet, if you omit the little cluster of humming-birds under their glass dome on the table, if you are confused on the subject of the green roses in the carpet.

Finally, in 1923, he made his first venture into fiction with the exquisite *Roman Pictures.* His narrator, a young man of the late 1890s, is determined to flush out the "real" Rome, and he soon abandons the lead of his more sophisticated friend, Deering, who purports to find it on the fringe of bohemia with fledgling actors and singers. The narrator's technique is simply to allow himself to drift from milieu to milieu, usually among expatriates or Italians with some foreign connection, since they are the persons most to hand. He explores the neighborhood of the Vatican, the atelier of a Romantic painter, a scholar's study, the Forum under the guidance of a professor, and finally the splendid salon of an intellectual English-born marchesa, the "real thing," if such still exists, only to meet there her nephew, who turns out to be . . . yes, Deering! E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* compared *Roman Pictures* with *The Ambassadors* as a perfect example of what he called the "great chain" plot.

Roman Pictures is fiction, but it is also the portrait of a city, and one feels that each of the characters is modeled upon someone whom Lubbock has observed. He did not have to know them well; a quip, a smile, a frown, a phrase, an attitude were all he needed to draw these wonderfully amusing caricatures for whom the fine pink glow of the Eternal City provides so vivid a background. Indeed, Rome is the principal character of the book. When the narrator sees and hears the great roaring crowd of pilgrims in St. Peter's, he wonders if a church can be the true temple of the Roman genius:

> It stands upon the hill of the Vatican in our day, and it has stood there for some little time; but its rightful place is the Capitol, the mount of triumph—it is there that the temple belongs. Kings and queens were led captive to that shrine, the multitude mocked and jeered at their abasement; and I see what is wanting to the due completeness of the resounding assembly in St. Peter's—it is the presence of captive kings and queens, brought low by the power of Rome, over whom the multitude might exult with glee and ferocity.

Lubbock had now set out the rules for the novel; he had mined the rich field of his childhood, and he had made his first experiment in fiction. He was ready for a major novel. All that he needed, at forty-five, was the right subject, and what did he have more precisely to hand than a young man's discipleship to a great artist? Like his own with Henry James?

The central theme of *The Region Cloud,* published in 1925, could indeed have sustained a Jamesian novel. It is the study of a fashionable and brilliant portrait painter, Channon, a monster of egotism, as seen through the eyes of his adoring but ultimately disillusioned secretary. Unfortunately, the protagonist turns into a straw man and a bore.

What is basically wrong with the novel is illustrated in the chapter where two critics, an academician and a modernist, visit Bintworth, Channon's great country estate, to study his work. The reader is thoroughly amused by their caustic reactions, vividly noted by the Lubbock of *Roman Pictures,* until the supposedly all-seeing secretary Austin says of them:

> Such are the diversions of a watchful spectator at Bintworth; they are trivial, and it is just their triviality that fixes them in the memory. For when they pass and cease, and when Channon is alone with his work again, the tiny echo they leave on the spacious air is absurd.

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But is it? Do we ever see Channon at work? We do not. Lubbock was simply unable to create a major character and to get inside of him. He had to work from models: persons, mansions, schools, cities; his genius lay solely in literary painting. He might have created a great picture of Henry James at work; he could not do Channon.

It is tempting to speculate that Austin, the secretary-narrator, may take on a bit of the nature of Lubbock himself. In one scene he toys with the idea that the only superiority he could possibly claim over Channon might lie in the fact that he has *not* indulged in the inevitable vulgarity of a practiced art but has remained aloof and pure as the uncontaminated observer and critic. Channon may be worth a pound a minute—yes—but Austin knows that he's not worth a penny more. But if Lubbock allowed himself this private fantasy of a momentary advantage over the master, James, he was quick to quash it in the end when Channon's discarded mistress points out a resemblance between Channon and Austin. For that's it; they are *both* egotists!

Did Lubbock know that he had failed in *The Region Cloud*? We only know that in a long life he never wrote another word of fiction. The year after its publication he married a rich, brilliant, beautiful, hypochondriacal English wife, Lady Sybil Cuffe, moved into the Villa Medici in Fiesole and spent much of his time taking care of her. When he published next, in 1929, it was to revert, happily and successfully, to a mood of nostalgia in *Shades of Eton.*

Lubbock's last book, in 1947, was *A Portrait of Edith Wharton.* Here he succeeds where he failed in *The Region Cloud,* for he does not have to invent his great artist; he has her. And his book is just what its title implies: a portrait. We see Edith Wharton always from the outside; we are warmed by her laughter, intrigued by her febrile activity, impressed by her perfectionism, awed by her rigorous standards, and chilled by her acerbity and hauteur. If Lubbock knew of her affair with Morton Fullerton—and he probably did—he saw no more need for it in his "portrait" than had he been actually limning her likeness.

Considerable objection to this book was voiced by friends of the subject, some of whom went so far as to suggest that the author had been motivated by unconscious malice engendered by the great Edith's dislike of Lady Sybil. Mrs. Wharton had regarded the bachelor Lubbock as a fixture in her "court" and had openly resented his appropriation by another. But from my conversations with many persons who knew Mrs. Wharton intimately and from my own memories of her particular generation of Manhattanites, which included my four grandparents, I feel that Lubbock has caught her to the life. He himself was horrified by the suggestion that he had meant to be derogatory. "But I adored her!" he cried.

I conclude that the reason Lubbock wrote so few books was that there were so few subjects available for his peculiar genius. A subject for his treatment had to be not only intimately known and felt but also to be bathed in nostalgia. Earlham Court and its garden, the masters of Eton, the Roman expatriates, the great Edith herself had to be recreated in lighted prose that would enable the reader to share Lubbock's love, bedazzlement, and amusement. The method would be always the pictorial—note the words "portrait," "pictures" and "shades" in his titles. He dealt with truth as it was outwardly presented or readily inferred; he made no pretense of opening closet doors or ferreting in desks. His art was like the art of John Singer Sargent: beauty was just as important as likeness, yet both were essential.

His only attempted fictional protagonist was covered over like Shakespeare's beautiful young friend by the image of the book's title:

> But out alack, he was but one hour mine,
> The region cloud hath masked him from
> me now.

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Letters

Correction

To the Editors:
I would like to correct an error of fact in my article, "The Representational Impulse: Painting in New York 1960-1985" (April, 1985). Contrary to my statement there, Sidney Tillim is represented in the recent anthology of writing from *Artforum—Looking Critically: 21 Years of Artforum Magazine*—with one of his important articles on representational painting, "A Variety of Realisms" (originally published in June, 1969). As to my description of this "omission" as a "scandal"—well, the scandal is all mine.

Jed Perl
New York City

Arthur Dove

To the Editors:
Despite Hilton Kramer's first-paragraph sideswipe at the "academic, lackluster" prose of my book, *Arthur Dove: Life and Work, With a Catalogue Raisonné,* I read his essay ("A Catalogue Raisonné for Arthur Dove," February, 1985) with interest. As he has in the past, Hilton Kramer writes about Dove's work with insight and, if I may say so, an admiration that seems no less ardent than that which he ascribes to me.

Nevertheless, because Mr. Kramer and I do not reach the same conclusions about the artist, I would like to raise a few points in relation to his review. For one thing, I would like to comment on Mr. Kramer's statement that I "simply cannot accept the fact of Dove's isolation from precisely the kind of history that, as an historian of modern art, obviously means the most to her." True. I am sorry that my book has not converted Mr. Kramer from the ahistorical view that he has promoted in all his writings on the artist for some twenty years. I would agree that Dove's art often has an idiosyncratic quality. But quite honestly, I was consciously trying to rescue Dove from the homely, down-on-the farm, island-unto-himself image that Stieglitz invented (as I point out) and that has been the official line on Dove ever since Paul Rosenfeld published the first major appreciation of his work in 1924. My desire to reveal the artist *in history*—as belonging to a context of *ideas,* particularly—does not mean that I therefore claim for him greater importance than he deserves. Indeed, I would agree with Mr. Kramer's contention that Dove is not "big." What Mr. Kramer rather deprecatingly interprets as some desperate compulsion on my part to see Dove in heroic terms seems to me to be his own misreading of my realistic assessment of Dove's interconnectedness with his times.

Among specific points, I do not understand why Mr. Kramer goes on at such length about the six 1910-11 abstractions, which he says are the "key paintings" in my "claim" for Dove as a "pioneer abstractionist." Too careful an historian to inflate these undated and unexhibited paintings, I tried to give an evenhanded assessment of their possible importance (which Mr. Kramer describes as "coming down on both sides of the issue"). Mr. Kramer is the one who seems to

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make too much of them. The question of who did the first abstract painting is a phoney issue. What is important is what the various artists did with the new idea, and in this regard, I said in so many words that the ten pastels that constituted the first public exhibition by an American of non-illusionistic art (seen in New York and Chicago in 1912) were "much more important" than the six oil abstractions. Incidentally, although Mr. Kramer and I may agree that ultimately Dove was not as "big" as Kandinsky, the work Dove showed in 1912 was far more influential for both artists and critics in the United States than was Kandinsky's work in the early years of abstract painting.

Well, Mr. Kramer and I could speak of many individual issues in the article and perhaps continue to disagree. Which is fine with me. But what is not so fine is Mr. Kramer's statement that "among knowledgeable insiders . . . there are already some complaints about omissions and factual errors." What kind of sleazy statement is that? Anyone who compiles a catalogue of this size would have to be certifiably looney to claim there were no omissions or errors. What appears in print is the best I could do within a finite amount of time, and of course I welcome further and updated information. I have to chuckle about Mr. Kramer's mysterious "knowledgeable insiders." As opposed to . . . myself, I suppose. Anyhow, to accuse my work of shortcomings by means of undocumented innuendo is not only unfair but should be beneath Mr. Kramer's standards. If Mr. Kramer as a reviewer knows about omissions or errors, then both I and your readers deserve to be told what they are.

Ann Lee Morgan
Chicago, Illinois

Hilton Kramer replies:

First, let's get the matter settled as to who is, and who is not, to be counted among "knowledgeable insiders" as far as expert information on the Arthur Dove oeuvre is concerned. It was not Ann Lee Morgan whom I meant to exclude from that company, but—myself! I am not a Dove specialist, and do not pretend to be. I assumed it would be clear from the tone and context of my remark that I was deferring, in this matter, to the scholars who know more about the documented facts than I do because it is they who have documented them. It would have been absurd to exclude Ann Lee Morgan from that distinguished company, and it had never been my intention to do so.

Second, the matter of what is missing from the *catalogue raisonné* itself. I shall mention only one outstanding example. The very first painting which the visitor to the exhibition at the Salander-O'Reilly Galleries encountered upon entering the premises—the painting called *Abstraction in Black, White and Brown* and believed to have been painted circa 1935-1940—is not in Morgan's catalogue. No explanation of its omission was offered to the visitors of the exhibition, either. Ann Lee Morgan cannot have it both ways. If she really welcomes further information, she shouldn't be so touchy about it. After all, she has already done the basic work —as I pointed out most emphatically in my article on her book.

Finally—and, in my opinion, most importantly—there is the question of placing Arthur Dove in relation to the art history of his time. Morgan's desire, she avows, was "to reveal the artist *in history*." But the history which she wishes to place Dove in a significant relation to has little or nothing to do with history as Dove himself experienced it. If she really has reason to believe that it was Stieglitz who "invented," as she claims, "the homely, down-on-the-farm" image of Dove, and that there is another Dove—a truer, more authentic, more historical Dove—who differs radically from this alleged Stieglitz invention, then she has an obligation to produce some evidence to support the notion. So far she hasn't. And I daresay, she can't. For, like it or not, what Morgan condescends to describe as "the homely, down-on-the-farm" Dove was the only Dove ever to exist in real historical time. Is it really the task of art history to "rescue" an artist from the kind of life he persevered in living, often at great personal sacrifice, because it suited his temperament and guaranteed his freedom? The argument here is not between my alleged "ahistorical view" of Dove and Ann Lee Morgan's avowed interest in "Dove's interconnectedness with his times." Morgan's real argument is with Dove's decision to live and work the way he did.

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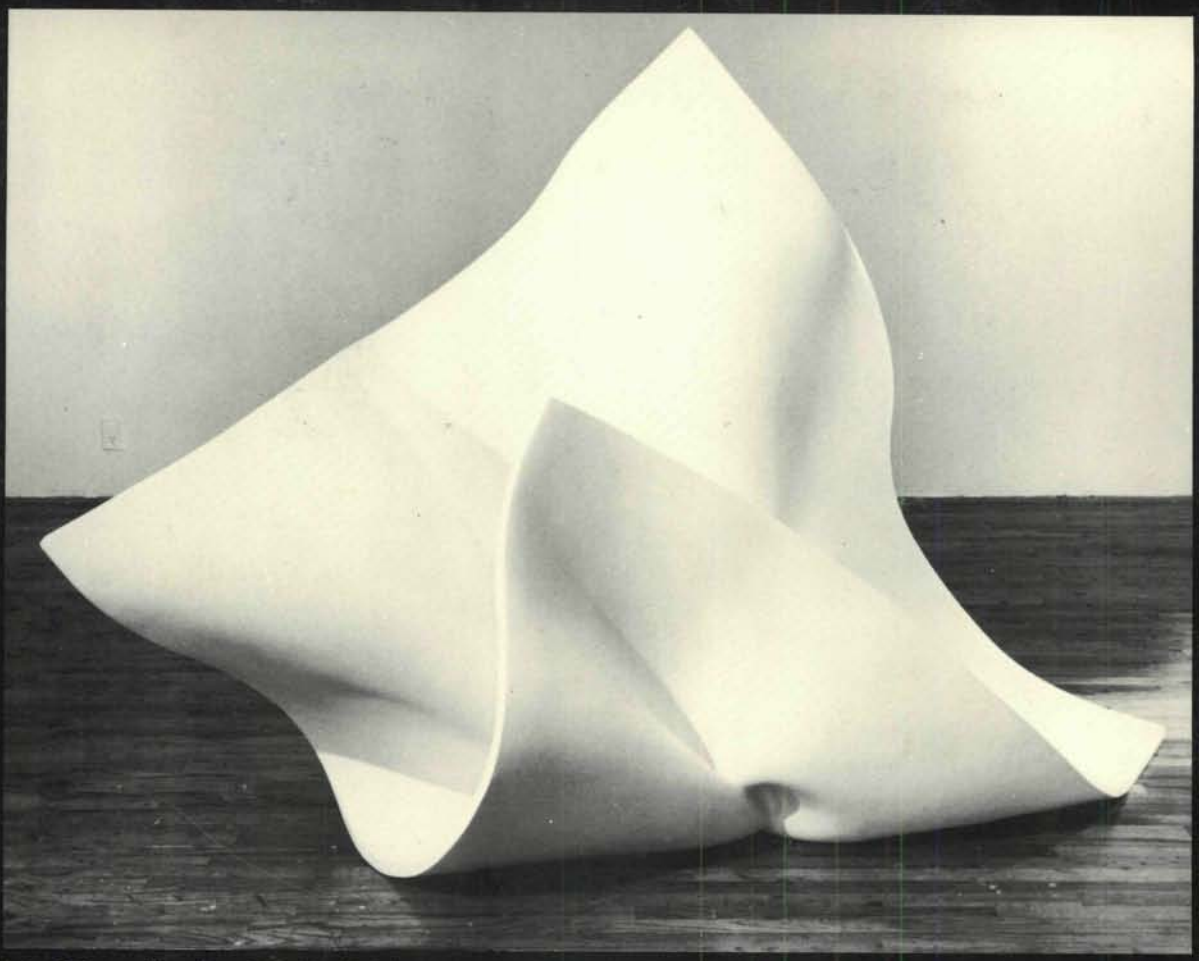

Vela, 1978, cast fiberglass, 62 x 96 x 33 inches

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